

Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation

*A Study of Symmetry and
Coherence in Islam's Holy Text*

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To Simon O'Meara in memory of many stimulating conversations during
evenings in Kuwait.

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Introduction

The subject of the Qur'an's structure has attracted inquiry and stirred debate for a very long time. Study of the holy book's form goes back at least as far as the Basran writer al-Jahiz (d. 255/868 or 869), who produced a work entitled *The Composition of the Qur'an*. And we are told that, in the fourth century AH/tenth century CE, a scholar named Abu Bakr al-Nisaburi would ask such questions as, "Why is this verse next to this other one?" and, "What is the wisdom in the placement of this chapter next to this other one?"; he would fault the Baghdad learned men of his day for their disregard of this type of questioning.¹ A difference of opinion emerged on the question of the Qur'an's unity, and the subject became a matter for debate. Through subsequent centuries, numerous scholars produced additional works detailing the Qur'an's coherence, testifying to the fact that the case still needed to be made in these centuries and to the continued opposition to their thesis among some persons. The debate over structural integrity has continued into the modern period, during which it has intensified.

During the classical era, the "Partisans of Coherence" went to great lengths to show the interconnection of the Qur'an. Basically, their method came to involve three elements:

- 1) for any given chapter, pointing out the relationship of each successive verse to its predecessor
- 2) at the end of a chapter, highlighting the correspondence between the last verse and the opening one for that chapter
- 3) at the beginning of a new chapter, pointing out the connection between the first verse and the last one from the preceding chapter.

They sought in this way to bring to light the concatenation of the Qur'an. This approach has more recently been described as "linear-atomistic," due to its focus on individual, successive verses, rather than on chapters as thematic units (lest

we fault them for narrowness, however, we might recall, with Jonathan Culler, that “the notion that the task of criticism is to reveal thematic unity is a post-Romantic concept”²). The group included such major figures of exegesis as al-Razi (d. 606/1209), al-Qurtubi (d. 671/1272), Nizam al-Din al-Nisaburi (d. 728/1327), Abu Hayyan (d. 745/1344), al-Biqa‘i (d. 885/1480), and, much later, al-Alusi (d. 1270/1854); Ibn al-Zubayr (d. 708/1308) and al-Suyuti (d. 911/1505) contributed smaller books focused solely on the concatenation of chapters. Their efforts bore fruit most notably in the impressive multivolume exegesis of al-Biqa‘i, *The Arrangement of Pearls: An Explanation of the Interconnection of Verses and Chapters*. Overall, their findings may be summarized in this statement by the Andalusi judge, Abu Bakr ibn al-‘Arabi (d. 543/1148): “The verses of the Qur'an are joined together in such manner that they are like a single word, harmoniously associated, structurally even.”³

Skeptics from the classical era, on the other hand, did not record much in the way of argument or evidence. One supposes they made judgments based on their impressions and left the matter at that. Perhaps, though, this statement by Ibn ‘Abd al-Salam (d. 660/1262), commenting on the ways of those classical interpreters given to linking sequences of verses and chapters in relationships of meaning, may adequately summarize the skeptics’ position:

The science of correlations is a fine one, yet in order to demonstrate coherence it must be applied to speech that is unified, whose beginning connects to its end. If it is applied to speech uttered for various reasons, it does not disclose unity, and whoever tries to join the parts thereof tasks himself with what he cannot do—except by means of tenuous links not found in good speech, to say nothing of the best. Verily, the Qur'an was revealed over a period of more than twenty years, gradually establishing and codifying different laws for various reasons, and what is revealed in this manner does not allow for the joining of all its parts.⁴

We should note, though, that to the majority of Muslims who memorized and recited the Qur'an, this debate most likely seemed academic. “The recited Qur'an is and has ever been the epitome of aesthetic as well as spiritual perfection for the faithful,” observe William A. Graham and Navid Kermani; and what these people knew and experienced as perfection, the Word of God, did not need to be explicated structurally. Still, we suppose that the large

majority would have come down on the side of the Partisans of Coherence, considering the Qur'an to be totally unified. Samuel Taylor Coleridge said, "The sense of beauty subsists in simultaneous intuition of the relation of parts, each to each, and of all to a whole."⁵ We suppose that this was the reaction of the majority upon listening to the Qur'an.

Coming to the modern period, we find among intellectuals and Orientalists in the West quite a different reaction to the Qur'an. In 1764 Voltaire stated, "The Qur'an is a rhapsody without liaison, without order, without art; it is said nevertheless that this boring book is a very beautiful book—I am referring here to the Arabs, who pretend it is written with an elegance and a purity that no one has approached since." The Scotsman Thomas Carlyle, in 1840, shared his opinion: "I must say, it is as toilsome reading as I ever undertook. A wearisome confused jumble, crude, incondite; endless iterations, long-windedness, entanglement [...] insupportable stupidity, in short!" German scholars Theodor Nöldeke and Friedrich Schwally later spoke of the Prophet Muhammad as being a "mediocre stylist," Hartwig Hirschfeld found the Qur'an "indescribably tedious," Richard Bell adverted to its "dreary welter," and so on. In our century, F. E. Peters repeats the general impression of this group, saying, "there is much in the Qur'an to baffle the reader," and, "the work seems to have been only marginally affected by a literary sensibility. There has been some cutting and pasting to be sure, and, for reasons we cannot fathom, some very unliterary arrangements."⁶

As Kermani has shown, an extremely sharp contrast can be made between the reaction of readers in this group and that of many people at hearing the Arabic Qur'an. He refers to the phenomenon of spontaneous conversion. Three of the early examples will suffice for our purposes. The first is that of the onetime stout adversary of the Muslims, the man who would become the second caliph, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (d. 23/644): "When I heard the Qur'an my heart was softened and I wept, and Islam entered into me." Next, that of a poet from the Prophet's lifetime: "It was a gentle and soulful recital. It bewitched the heart and caressed the mind. Such an attraction was in the recitation that no man of poetry and letters could resist. In it, he found a wave of tenderness and a spiritual wealth in its meaning, which he had never heard in human speech before." Last, that of another early convert, whose experience was explained by the Egyptian scholar Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafi'i (d. 1937): "Every single part of his mind was touched by the pure sound of the language's music, and portion by portion, note

by note, he embraced its harmony, the perfection of its pattern, its formal completion. It was not so much as if something was recited to him but rather as if something had burned itself into him.”⁷

By way of clarification, we mention at this point that there are two different compositional orders relating to the Qur'an. The first is the revelatory order, the chronological sequence of verses and chapters vouchsafed to the Prophet over a period of twenty-three years, from 610 until 11/632. The second is the completed order, since all the component parts of Scripture were arranged into a new, final form once revelation was complete. The first order cannot be known precisely; the second is the Qur'an we have before us today.⁸

We add, moreover, that it is this second arrangement, the existing Qur'an, that Western historical and philological scholars have found so objectionable, so “disjointed” (note Carlyle: “Read in its historical sequence [the Qur'an] perhaps would not be so bad”). Indeed, numerous translators, such as Rodwell in the nineteenth century, Bell and Blachère in the twentieth, and Starkovsky in the twenty-first, have taken it upon themselves to rearrange the text, attempting to make it more “logical” for their respective audiences. This negative reaction to the Qur'an, by the way, parallels the reaction by most Western scholars during the same period to classical Arabic poetry. These latter scholars found the Arabic poems to be mainly incoherent; J. W. Redhouse, for instance, a contemporary of Rodwell, rearranged the lines of one of the major poetic works in the canon.⁹

Meanwhile, in the twentieth century, significant developments occurred in the study of the Qur'an. Exegetes began to approach individual chapters holistically, discussing them in terms of overall themes and general structure rather than concatenation. Important figures in this regard are ‘Abd al-Hamid al-Farahi (d. 1930) and Amin Islahi (d. 1997) of India and Pakistan, Muhammad al-Tabataba’i (d. 1981) of Iran, and Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966) of Egypt. Since the 1980s, numerous scholars in the field have followed their lead and have begun to show clearly that individual chapters, both short and long, are indeed characterized by a high degree of unity. Of these, one may single out for mention Angelika Neuwirth, Pierre Crapon de Caprona, Mustansir Mir, Muhammad Abdel Haleem, Matthias Zahniser, Neal Robinson, Carl Ernst, and, especially, Michel Cuypers. This book develops out of the work of these various predecessors in the area of modern textual criticism. It affirms that the whole Qur'an, including all its arranged parts, possesses a magnificent design. First,

however, before proceeding to a demonstration of this thesis in the subsequent chapters of our study, a brief discussion follows of the key structural principle existing in the Qur'an.

As will become progressively evident, the whole Qur'an is arranged according to the law of symmetry. Michel Cuypers, drawing on the analysis by Roland Meynet of Biblical texts, has shown that symmetry manifests itself in the Qur'an in three ways:

- 1) according to *parallelism*, whereby the structure takes the form AB/A'B' (the parallel string can be longer, of course, as in ABC/A'B'C')
- 2) by *chiasm*, or inverted parallelism whereby the structure takes the form AB/B'A'
- 3) by *concentrism*, which is like chiasm but includes a unique central element: AB/C/B'A'¹⁰

The last of these forms, concentrism, is by far the most prevalent type of symmetry in the Qur'an. Incidentally, one notes that these symmetrical structures accommodate insertions and so are excellently suited—more so, it would seem, than a straightforward linear structure—to revelation over time (e.g., the arrangement AB/C/B'A' may be made to incorporate new elements, so that the final structure, for example, results in ABC/D/C'B'A'). These three types of symmetry occur in individual chapters and render them cohesive and tightly structured.

In addition, Amin Islahi has also argued that most chapters occur as pairs. He asserts that the majority of chapters form pairs with adjacent chapters, such that two chapters complement each other in some important way. In this manner two independent wholes join together and form a new unit (again, an example of symmetry). He also argues that pairs then combine to form chapter groups, and that the Qur'an as a whole is made up of numerous chapter groups. Lately, Cuypers has also highlighted the incidence of joined chapter pairs and of cohesive, symmetrically arranged chapter groups.¹¹

I incorporate and develop the work of both of these scholars in order to shed more light on the structure of the Qur'an. For example, I show that a concentric order inheres in [Chapter 2](#), the longest chapter, giving it unity. Likewise, I discuss chapter pairs and point out the existence of chapter groups—groups composed of chapter pairs and of certain individual chapters. Moreover, I show

that these groups are in fact arranged in concentric order, such that nine opening groups correspond with nine closing groups, embedding a central group dealing with the Hereafter.

In addition, relating specifically to concentricism, this study benefits from the literary insights of Mary Douglas, as expostulated in *Thinking in Circles: An Essay on Ring Composition* (2007). As Douglas indicates, the most prominent feature of a ring is the correspondence between the beginning and the end. The correspondence usually involves the repetition of a conspicuous word or phrase, such as a proper name; also, there must be a clear thematic connection between the two sections. The correspondence serves to complete the circle and provide closure. In similar fashion, interior sections correspond to each other. The middle section of the ring then frequently accords with both the beginning and the end, a mark of strong cohesion and unity. (On a smaller scale, the pattern may repeat itself, as individual sections may themselves be composed of little rings.) Furthermore, besides holding the text together, the form guides interpretation. Indeed the effect of ring composition, according to Douglas, “is to give special emphasis to the pivotal central point.” By means of concentric patterning, ring composition calls attention to the center. We are drawn to look here for the essential message. As Douglas notes concisely, “The meaning is in the middle.”¹²

Essentially, this book has two objectives. First, it seeks to refute—indeed, to lay to rest—the longstanding criticism of “disjointedness” and to encourage in its place an increased appreciation for the organization of the Qur'an. Second, insofar as structure can serve to frame meaning, it aims to show how a better understanding of the Qur'an's structure may, in fact, aid in our interpretation of the text.

Note on Diagrams and Structural Summaries

Different typeface styles (bold, underline, and italic) are used to indicate relationships between corresponding elements. Bold is used especially to indicate a correspondence between beginning, middle, and end, while underline is generally used to indicate an interior correspondence. Italic is used less frequently to indicate a match between a particular element and another. The prime marker ('), occurring in the second half of a diagram or summary, indicates a correspondence with a previous section or part.

One: Framing the Qur'an

We will begin with the first chapter of the Qur'an, *The Opening*. It is likely an early Meccan revelation, dating to the period when the Prophet Muhammad was lacking in full confidence about his calling and deeply unsettled, overwhelmed by the sudden approach of the Divine, and speaking of religious matters only to a close circle of family and friends. According to Muslim tradition, it is one of the first chapters revealed to him, if not the very first. (For reference, it is useful to keep in mind four phases of the Prophet's mission [the dates for the first three phases are rough]: 610-614, when the Prophet spoke of religion to a select few individuals; 614-619, a time of public preaching; 619-622, a period of increasing local opposition; and 0-11/622-632, the Medinan phase.) Western scholarship, based on considerations of style such as verse length, frequency of oaths, and the like, has divided the Qur'an into Early Meccan, Middle Meccan, Late Meccan, and Medinan chapters. The scholarship supports Muslim tradition on the dating of this chapter, classifying it as early Meccan.¹

The Opening is called "Umm al-Kitab," the "Essence of the Book," and indeed it epitomizes the Qur'an in terms of structure and theme, as we shall see below. First, however, let us briefly explain the terms associated with the Qur'an and outline the Book's form.

Though for the sake of simplicity we use translated words in this study, the Qur'an is in fact identified by unique Arabic terminology. The word *Qur'an* means "Recitation," and no other Arabic speech or text has this name. Likewise, a chapter is designated with the particular name of *sura*, meaning a "unit of scripture," and a verse is called an *aya*, literally a "sign" sent from God. Lastly, within a verse itself, *fasila* (rhyme or assonance) signifies a pause in the revelation. Al-Jahiz has remarked on the specialness of this nomenclature, contrasting it to that of poetry, the main classical Arabic literary form: "God named His Book differently from how the Arabs named their speech, both wholly and with respect to parts. He named the totality of it a *Qur'an* as they say *Diwan* (a collected body of poetry), a part of it *sura* as they say *qasida* (poem), a

single element *aya* as they say *bayt* (line), and an ending *fasila* as they say *qafiya* (rhyme consonant)."²

Given the uniqueness of the Qur'an, these special terms are apt.

Looking at form, one finds that each chapter consists of a number of verses. The chapters vary considerably in length, from 286 verses to three. Subsequent to *The Opening*, which is short, they occur mostly in order of decreasing length. A total of 114 chapters make up the entire Qur'an.

Below is a translation of *The Opening*. We will discuss the invocation and each verse individually, and next offer some remarks about the chapter's structure and its relation to the rest of the text.

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate:

1. Praise be to God, Lord of all peoples,
2. The Merciful, the Compassionate,
3. Master of the Day of Reckoning.
4. You alone we worship; You alone we ask for aid.
5. Guide us on the Straight Path,
6. The Path of those You favored, not of those who incurred wrath, nor those who went astray.

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate:

This invocation is an aural device used to announce the beginning of a chapter. It occurs before every chapter except Chapter 9, which opens with a call for Muslims to fight idolaters (in this location, the words would be jarring). Classical opinion was split on the status of this invocation: Readers and jurists from Medina, Basra, and Damascus, for example, did not consider it a verse, while those from Mecca and Kufa did.³ Modern opinion tends to count it as a verse in this place, but not elsewhere, citing 15:87, *We have brought you seven of the mathani* [frequently translated as 'oft-repeated verses'] *and the Glorious Qur'an* (it being known that an observant Muslim will recite *The Opening* at least seventeen times in a day). Later in our study we will propose an alternate interpretation for 15:87, by which the word *mathani* is construed to designate another section of the text. For now, we note the inconsistency of counting the invocation as a verse here when it is not counted as one elsewhere. Also,

structurally it does not contribute to the chapter; the verse structure is complete without it.

Here, then, is what may rightly be considered the first verse of the Qur'an:

1 Praise be to God, Lord of all peoples,

The Recitation begins with praise to the Lord of all peoples. The Arabic term is *rabb al-'alamin*, which can be rendered also as "Lord of all rational beings." Ibn 'Abbas (d. 69/689), cousin of the Prophet and founder of the discipline of Qur'anic exegesis, and several other early authorities interpreted *al-'alamin* to mean specifically "humankind and jinn." Following them, we understand that the referents here are communities of humans and jinn. The rest of God's creatures praise Him instinctively, noon and night (see 17:44: *The seven heavens and the earth, and all that is therein, sing God's praise: there is not a single thing that does not exalt Him; yet you do not understand their praise.*). Humans and jinn, on the other hand, must do it knowingly using their faculty of reason; the Qur'an is sent for them.⁴

Who exactly are the jinn, one might ask, and what are their qualities besides intelligence? They are spirits, a parallel species to humans, ethereal and invisible beings alongside the corporeal humans. Occasionally these subtle creatures impinge on our world: Jinn can manifest themselves, and may inspire humans or possess them. Like us, jinn are endowed with free will and shall be held accountable for their actions; they will be brought forth on Judgment Day with humans, and either granted access to the Garden or forced into the Fire. Regarding the all-important matter of choosing a religion, we add about jinn that, while apparently more prone to evil than humans, they are capable of receiving guidance. In this connection, it is significant to remember that the Prophet—though perhaps called to address humans primarily—was sent to guide both humankind and jinn. Jinn can hear our recitations and comprehend them (see 46:29-32, in which it is reported of a group of jinn having listened to the Qur'an and becoming convinced of its veracity). They may take notice when the Qur'an is recited and relate what they learn to others of their kind.⁵

Notably, the words of exaltation in verse 1 of *The Opening* will be said ultimately by all the faithful before their Master once Judgment has been pronounced. On that Day, after God has ruled, a cry will arise, *Praise be to God, Lord of all peoples* (39:75; compare also 1:1 and 10:10). Thus we find a link between the opening praise in the Qur'an and the close of time; the final scene is anticipated in the first verse. As T. S. Eliot has said in a different context, "The

end is where we start from.”⁶

2 The Merciful, the Compassionate,

After a first verse emphasizing God’s awesomeness, we encounter this one emphasizing His mercy (note al-Qurtubi, who finds the first verse inspiring fear, the second inspiring longing). The two Arabic words of the verse, *al-Rahman al-Rahim*, complement each other: Both are intensive adjectival forms stressing mercy. The first may only be used for God and connotes mercy in great matters (one may likewise translate it as “The All-Merciful” corresponding to “The Almighty”). The second form may also be used to describe humans; it suggests mercy on a smaller scale. According to al-Razi, it is paired with the first so that readers and listeners appreciate that God, in all His boundless magnificence, can still be asked for small mercies.⁷

3 Master of the Day of Reckoning.

The third verse completes the sentence (vv. 1-3) consisting of praise of God. We return here to the initial idea of God’s might and authority, His awesomeness. As exegetes have pointed out, the Arabic word for “Master” in the verse is synonymous with that for “Lord” from the first verse.⁸ Here we come back clearly to the idea of the Day of Reckoning, alluded to in verse 1 by the reference to humans and jinn (the classes of beings who will be judged) and by the specific words of praise there (to be uttered finally at the close of time). The sentence ends striking a note of fear.

4 You alone we worship; You alone we ask for aid.

Humankind and jinn were created in order to worship God, as the Qur'an states (51:56). Verse 4 affirms this worship of God and it pointedly excludes all other deities. In addition, following the first sentence's grave reminder of humankind and jinn's Last Day, this verse marks a transition to earnest supplication. The exact nature of this supplication becomes clear in the remainder of the chapter.

5 Guide us on the Straight Path,

The metaphor suggested here is of travel, especially travel through desert. We recall that caravans normally traveled at night, taking shelter and resting during the daytime heat. At night, they would navigate by the heavenly lights. In effect, the verse beseeches God: “Light the way; provide us with Your Guiding Light.” As we shall indicate below, this is a request that, in turn, is granted by the

revelation of the Qur'an. For now, we may note that the Qur'an refers to itself, in fact, as "a manifest light" (4:174), and that the Straight Path terminates, metaphorically, at God Himself, the Light of the heavens and the earth (4:175; 24:35). The Book is the Guiding Light that leads us to the Source.⁹

6 The Path of those You favored, not of those who incurred wrath, nor those who went astray.

Turning again to the suggested metaphor, we recall that for a caravan in the desert, heading in the right direction is a matter of life and death. A contemporary of the Prophet, al-Khansa', speaks memorably in one poem of a traveling party at a perilous spot, their guide having become confused, with darkness around them the color of tar.¹⁰ For the parties who have disobeyed God and headed in another direction, willfully ignoring His Light, as well as those who have veered off because they have lost it, their gloomy fate is understood.

Nevertheless, while this concluding verse indicates destruction for some, at the same time it stresses mercy. For God has favored people with His grace. We see here that the bestowing of favor is connected actively with God, whereas wrath comes down impersonally.

We also note that divine mercy does not begin with God's imparting of the Qur'an; rather, the verse implies that believers follow in the footsteps of previous generations. Earlier, for example, God favored Solomon and his parents (27:19). The significance of this idea of continuation, of coming after faithful predecessors, has been pointed out by Mustansir Mir. According to Mir, "The verse subtly suggests that, in its essentials, the Straight Path has always been the same and that those who follow this path are, irrespective of whether they belong to ancient times or modern times, members of a single community."¹¹ The guidance offered in the Qur'an therefore does not represent a new departure, a way, at long last, to obtain God's mercy. Rather, it is an elaboration of the existing way, the way of believers throughout the ages, now sent down definitively and without equivocation in clear Arabic Scripture.

We mentioned that *The Opening* epitomizes the Qur'an. Thematically, we see that this is the case, for it highlights the text's main themes: monotheism (v. 4), guidance by means of revelation (w. 5-6), and the Hereafter (w. 1-3). We might mention as well that *The Opening* introduces God's principle attributes, infinite majesty and infinite mercy. One might compare this introduction to the

initial teaching of Adam: God, immediately after creating Adam, teaches him the names of all things (2:31). Here at the beginning, the Qur'an offers praise identifying God—encomium stating His names and illuminating His main attributes—before declaring exclusive worship of God and imploring to be shown the way that leads to His mercy.

Let us turn now to structure. The first three verses constitute a small ring:

Praise of God, Lord of all peoples (Awesomeness)

Merciful and Compassionate (Mercy stressed twice)

Master of the Day of Reckoning (Awesomeness)

These verses, one sentence, venerate and pay tribute to God. Next, in the center of *The Opening*, there is a two-part sentence that links the first sentence (worship) and the last (supplication).¹² Verses 5-6 then constitute a second small ring:

Show us the Straight Path (Guidance)

Path of those You favored, (Mercy emphasized)
Not of those who incurred wrath (God not associated with wrath:
Mercy emphasized)

Nor those who went astray (Lack of Guidance)

We observe also that the second small ring above corresponds to the first—mercy is emphasized twice in the center of each—and that the fourth verse contains the main ideas of both rings. The overall structure of *The Opening* may be summarized as follows:

Ring: Worship (Mercy centered and stressed twice)

Center: Worship and Supplication

Ring: Supplication (Mercy centered and stressed twice)

Thus we see that *The Opening* has a concentric structure, consisting of two corresponding, outlying parts—theirelves consisting of smaller rings—that

enclose a central part relating to them both. Such, we shall find, is the internal arrangement of the Qur'an. Structurally, then, *The Opening* epitomizes the text as well.

Concerning the Qur'an's structure, we notice also the link between [Chapter 1](#) and Chapter 114, the second of the two Prayers of Refuge and the last chapter of the Qur'an. Chapter 114, *People*, is likewise thought to be an early Meccan revelation (as is the other Prayer of Refuge, *The Daybreak*; we will discuss the structural and thematic pairing of 113-114 later, in our third chapter). Here is a translation of the Qur'an's concluding chapter:

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate:

- 1 *Say, I seek refuge with the Lord of people,*
- 2 *King of people,*
- 3 *God of people,*
- 4 *From the evil of the slinking whisperer,*
- 5 *Who whispers in the hearts of people,*
- 6 *Of jinn and humankind.*

Al-Biqa'i notes the connection between the beginning and end of the Qur'an, pointing out that the first verses of each chapter state names of God.¹³ The corresponding names are Lord, God, Master/King (Maalik/Malik in Arabic); thus:

1:1, 3	God Lord Master
114:1-3	Lord King God

We add that both chapters are prayers, and that both chapters consist of six verses. Furthermore, we perceive the link between the very last verse of the Qur'an and the very first. Both verses refer to humankind and jinn, the two classes of beings who need to take refuge in God from Satan (*the slinking*

whisperer who tries to plant doubt and lead them astray), the two classes who shall ultimately face Judgment, the two classes for whom the Qur'an is intended.

Stepping back, we see that prayers frame the Qur'an's corpus:

Chapter 1	Prayer of Worship and Supplication
Chapters 2-112	Qur'anic Guidance
Chapters 113-114	Prayers of Refuge

The Qur'an commences with a prayer exalting God and asking for His guidance. The body of the Qur'an then represents an answer to this prayer, showing the way. Finally, the text ends with two prayers dispelling evil.

Having discussed *The Opening*, we shall begin looking next at the body of the Qur'an, God's answer to prayer.

Two: The Chapter as Unity

In this chapter we will discuss the idea of the Qur'anic chapter as an organic whole, as a structurally and thematically coherent discourse. That every one of the 114 chapters constitutes a whole is a principle implied in the Qur'an, as in 2:23: *If you are in doubt about what We have revealed to Our servant, then come forth with a comparable sura.* The individual chapter is adduced as a unit for comparison, words of divine origin that may be measured against human speech. Per the challenge, any chapter can be taken as a complete example of God's revelation. In our introduction, we mentioned that the interpretation of Qur'anic chapters as organic unities has been a development of modern exegesis, notable since Farahi (d. 1930). Our study continues this trend. In the preceding pages we examined a short chapter, *The Opening*, highlighting it as a prayer of praise and supplication. Now we will look at a long chapter, *The Cow* (the second chapter and the longest in the Qur'an), pointing to it as another example of unity.

The Cow was revealed for the most part after the Prophet's emigration with his followers to Medina in 622 (certain verses may have been added later). He had been forced to leave his native city due to increasing hostility there, and in Medina the new religion found a more hospitable environment. Nevertheless, the hour remained critical. The Ka'ba was still being desecrated by idol-worship, and Muslims faced great danger if they attempted to perform the pilgrimage. Meanwhile, challenges and disputes were being heard from the local Jews and Christians. Not surprisingly, *The Cow* answers pressing concerns of the Muslims at this time. Thematically, it differentiates Islam from the two revealed religions, Judaism and Christianity, and identifies the Muslims as a new median community. It furthermore readies the Muslims for a military clash with the Meccan polytheists. And throughout, it highlights the *sine qua non* of the new religion, of utmost pertinence now in the face of Jewish and Christian rejection in Medina and pagan antagonism abroad: faith.

Chapter 2 consists of seven sections:

- A (1-39)
- B (40-112)
- C (113-41)
- D (142-52)
- C' (153-77)
- B' (178-242)
- A' (243-86)

We will go through the seven sections individually and then conclude with a review of the chapter's unity and its key messages.

A (1-39)

The Cow begins with three letters, ALM, and an affirmation that the Qur'an is guidance for those who fear God.¹ In stating that the Qur'an is guidance, [Chapter 2](#) is thus linked with *The Opening*, which concludes with a request for guidance (vv. 5-6). The body of the Qur'an opens with a response (note al-Zarkashi: "It is as if, when people asked to be shown the way, the answer came: 'here is the guidance you sought: it is the Qur'an'"²). The first part of A (1-20) then goes on to identify the believers and to contrast them with the disbelievers. In particular, with reference to the disbelievers, it describes the hypocrites, those who profess belief but who, in private, deny it and return to their false gods. A grievous penalty awaits them, the text affirms. The first part of A ends with similitudes about the blindness and deafness of the disbelievers, anticipating the use of a similitude in the middle part of A (21-29). This type of connection between the end of one part or section or chapter and the middle of another is a very common feature in the Qur'an. (For a structural view of this section, and of other sections and chapters we discuss in our study, see [Appendix A.](#))³

The middle part of section A begins with a command for people to worship God, their Creator. There follows a challenge to those who might harbor doubts about the authenticity of God's Word, that they produce a comparable chapter of revelation. They will be unable to do so, the next verse tells us. In the central three verses, we encounter the following: The Prophet is commanded to convey the good news to those who believe and do good works, that they will enjoy Gardens with ever-replenished fruits and pure companions; a statement occurs about God's not disdaining to make comparisons, even to something as small as a gnat—for, by such, believers understand the truth and disbelievers are left

confounded; and a statement follows that those who break God's covenant and spread corruption on earth will be the ultimate losers. As al-Zamakhshari has observed here, it is God's way in His Book to provide a hopeful message along with a warning.⁴ We also notice in the central verses an emphasis on free will: By similitudes God guides many and causes many to stray, but He only causes to stray those who rebel, those who voluntarily reject His message. They are the ones who break God's covenant and spread corruption on earth; consequently, they bear responsibility for their fate. The middle part concludes with a short address to the disbelievers, asking them how they can reject faith when God gave them life, will cause them to die, and will raise them again, and created for them all that is on earth and then made the seven heavens. In this manner, with a reference to God's creation, the middle part ends similarly to the way it began.

The concluding part of A relates the first example of belief and disbelief in religious history, the episode involving Adam and Satan in the heavenly Garden. God informs the angels that He will create a vicegerent on earth, and they register surprise that He will appoint as His deputy someone who will shed blood and cause harm, whereas they only praise and glorify Him. But their knowledge is limited (humans are distinguished from angels, among other ways, in that they know more and possess free will). God teaches Adam the names of all things, of which the angels are unaware, and then He commands the angels to bow down before Adam. Yet Satan, one of the jinn (see 18:50) and possessed of free will, and moreover a being who is present in the Garden, refuses to join the angels in prostration. Regarding this latter figure, we might consider Fazlur Rahman's observation that "the Qur'an constantly speaks of Satan not so much as an anti-God principle (although he is undoubtedly a rebel against God, and, indeed, personifies this rebellious nature) but rather as an anti-man force, perpetually trying to seduce man away from his natural 'straight' path into deviant behavior."⁵ Indeed, according to the narrative, he tempts Adam and his spouse to eat fruit of the forbidden tree, for which all three are expelled from the Garden and sent down to earth. Thereafter, God teaches Adam certain words (cf. 7:23, in which Adam and his spouse are quoted as seeking forgiveness), and God is forgiving. The last two verses return from the specific to the general, underscoring once more the contrasting fates of believers who follow God's guidance and disbelievers who reject His signs.

At this juncture, it might be of interest to point out a key difference between the Qur'anic narrative of the Garden and the one found in Genesis. Here, the

spouse—called Eve by the exegetes, though she is not named in the Qur'an—does not tempt Adam. Rather, it is Satan who tempts them both. And unlike in Christian theology, there is no concept in Islam of original sin, which burdens humanity until Christ appears and redeems all people by dying on the Cross. In the Qur'an, Adam is tempted and disobeys God, and for this disregard he is punished. But then he repents (in so doing, establishing a paradigm for humanity), and upon his repentance God forgives him.

B (40-112)

The long second section is tripartite and is addressed mostly to the Children of Israel. It opens with a part calling them to believe in what God has sent down and to pray with the believers. The last part states that many of them, in fact, reject the Scripture and do not believe.

The central part mainly recounts the Israelites' exodus from Egypt, their worship of the golden calf, and their Prophet Moses' receipt of the Scripture at Mount Sinai. The part is itself subdivided into three components: two outer small rings and a set of middle verses. The centers of the two outer small rings correspond, relating both to the idea of religious exclusiveness. The Israelites are quoted as expecting special treatment in the Afterlife, light punishment for their sins (v. 80). Contrary to this, as the Qur'an explains, the sinners among them will be punished just like other transgressors. Meanwhile, among people, those who believe and do good works—including such as them among Jews, Christians, and Sabians—will have nothing to fear in the Afterlife (v. 62; compare v. 82).⁶ Here, in two central places, the Qur'an speaks of equality of people and religious pluralism. Sinners will be punished equally, and those who believe and perform good works, not just the adherents of a particular religion, will enjoy God's everlasting rewards.

The middle verses relate the episode of the cow, from which this chapter is named. Moses tells the people that God has commanded that they sacrifice a cow. But rather than complying promptly with God's command, they ask Moses questions as to the exact kind of cow that should be sacrificed (three queries: apparently pertaining to the cow's age, color, and the type of work it may have performed). It is obvious from the reaction of Moses that what has been called for is ready obedience, not obedience postponed until a series of details can be obtained. Finally, they do sacrifice a certain cow, though hardly willingly. The episode, of course, is symbolic. It exemplifies, per the Qur'an, two spiritual

faults of the Children of Israel: their tendency to disbelieve prophets and their formal, legal approach to religion. Significantly, the episode also represents the way the contemporary Jews of Medina were treating the Prophet Muhammad—posing many questions, though not out of sincere desire to practice his religion, taking him and his message lightly. The applicability to the contemporary scene suggests that, in the Prophet’s case too, God is not unaware of what they are doing and will bring to light their misdeeds (vv. 72, 74).

C (113-41)

Section C is also tripartite, consisting of three rings. As a whole, the section deals with the arguments of the Jews and Christians: their disputes among themselves and their rejection of each other, and their quarrels with the Muslims and attempts to convert them. The center of the first ring cites the Christians’ claim that God has a son and states, in response, that everything in the heavens and on earth worships God. The center of the last ring corresponds to the middle of the first; it affirms that the Muslims make no distinction among the prophets (unlike the Christians in their exaltation of Jesus) and submit themselves to God. Further, the last ring asks how Jews and Christians can argue with Muslims when God is the Lord of them all, and all will be held responsible for their actions.

The middle part concerns Abraham, common patriarch to the three religions. It relates his involvement with his son Ishmael in the building of the Ka‘ba (Ishmael is the ancestor of the Arabs; Abraham’s other son, Isaac, is the father of Jacob, through whom descend the twelve tribes of Israel). As the text informs us, Abraham has been tested by God and found dutiful, and he and Ishmael are commanded to purify the House as a place of worship. Abraham prays for the security of Mecca and for its prosperity (the site for the Ka‘ba lies next to an uncultivated valley; cf. 14:37). Specifically, he prays for the prosperity there of those who believe in God and the Last Day. God replies that those who disbelieve will enjoy only temporary pleasure and then be driven into the Fire. Abraham and Ishmael raise the foundations of God’s House. Next, they pray for their descendants, that God might make of them a community submissive to Him; that He might show the community their religious rites; that He might accept their repentance; and that He might send among them a prophet to teach them the Scripture and to purify them.⁷ The central part of C thus points out the importance of Abraham and Ishmael, indicating their connection to the future

Muslim community. This linkage establishes the community as firmly within the tradition of Abrahamic monotheism—despite the attempts by Jews and Christians to exclude them. In addition, the central part of C highlights Mecca. Structurally, the latter emphasis prepares for D, as we shall see shortly.

D (142-52)

The middle section of [Chapter 2](#) indicates the prayer direction for Muslims. Previously, in the first years of the Prophet's mission, their prayer direction had been to the north, toward Jerusalem (according to tradition, in Mecca the Prophet had prayed from the south side of the Ka'ba, so that he was facing the Ka'ba and also Jerusalem located behind it).⁸ The Jews also prayed facing Jerusalem, while the Christians prayed to the east, in the direction of the rising sun. Now the Muslims must turn southward and face Mecca. Mecca, specifically the Ka'ba, God's Sacred House built by Abraham and Ishmael, becomes the religious center of Islam. The change tests the faith of those who would follow the Prophet and clearly distinguishes the Muslims from the Jews and Christians.

In the middle section also the Muslims are identified as a median community. Here the chapter highlights Islam's position among the revealed religions, between the formalism of Judaism, as illustrated in B through the example of the cow, and the exaggerated belief or doctrinal extravagance of Christianity, highlighted in the previous section. Islam is positioned as a golden mean. The adherents to the new religion obey God's law fully—without losing awareness of the law's spirit—and remain strictly monotheistic. [Chapter 2](#), in the last two sections and this one, situates Islam among the Abrahamic faiths.

In the very middle verses of the section (vv. 147-48), there is an emphasis on the truth of this message about the new prayer direction, and an exhortation to doubt not, to have faith. The message is then put in larger perspective: *Every community has its own direction, so compete with each other in doing good works. Wherever you are, God will bring you together.* This verse echoes what the Qur'an states elsewhere (5:48): *For every people We have prescribed a law and a clear way, and had God willed He would have made of you a single community. But He wanted to test you in what He has brought to you. So compete with each other in doing good works. To God you will all return, and He will make clear what you differed about.* Hence, while this middle section affirms that Muslims constitute a median community, it likewise emphasizes pluralism. True, it orients and distinguishes the Muslims as a unified group of

believers, yet at the same time it downplays the importance of their specific prayer direction. As we read in the same chapter, *To God belong the East and the West. Wherever you turn, there is the Face of God* (2:115; cf. 2:142). Muslims face toward Mecca in prayer, indeed, but difference between communities is likewise part of God's plan. All rightly guided communities, wherever they face, evidently submit to the One God. So whatever their differences in orientation, they should vie with each other in goodness and God will bring them together.

C' (153-77)

In the second half of the chapter, there is a gradual shift of focus. These sections are addressed primarily to the Muslims and are concerned more with providing them further guidance and preparing them to confront the pagans of Mecca than with responding to the People of the Book, the Jews and Christians.

Section C' begins this transition. Accordingly, while it points to severe punishment for those who hide what God has revealed of the Scripture—except for those of them who repent—it begins by assuring the believers that they will be tried and by adjuring patient perseverance and prayer. This leads to the mention of Safa and Marwa, two symbolic monuments of prayer and patient perseverance. It was around these hills by Mecca (now part of the city) that Hagar, mother of the baby Ishmael, prayed and searched for water in the dry desert. Her prayer was answered and she came upon the Zamzam spring. In commemoration of this, pilgrims to Mecca circulate between the hills. Yet the polytheists had placed two idols atop them, and the Muslims were hesitant to perform this rite. Verse 158 affirms that there is no harm in doing so and that God recognizes good deeds. With this verse the rite is reclaimed for God.⁹

The center of this section deals with those who reject faith, those who follow the practices of their ancestors. Because idolaters are wont to make animal sacrifices to the deities, certain laws about food are detailed here.¹⁰ People are told to eat of what good God has provided for them; they should only avoid carrion, pig, blood, and animals over which any name other than God's has been invoked. Yet if they eat these forbidden foods due to hunger, then God is forgiving. In the center also, we notice a pointed contrast between the way of disbelievers in blindly following their ancestors and the example of Abraham. We may recall that Abraham argued with his father about the worship of many gods, referring to the impotence of these deities and warning his father about

joining Satan in Hell for his paganism. But the father would hear none of this, even threatening to stone Abraham. So Abraham broke with his father and his forefathers, and he turned from the deities they invoked besides God.¹¹ Here, by the discussion of food (cf. 2:126), and by the implied contrast between the inherited polytheism of the Meccans and Abraham's submission to God (cf. 2:128), the middle of section C' recalls the middle of C.

B' (178-242)

At this place we come to a long, legislative section, containing revelatory responses to the Prophet regarding questions he has been receiving about Muslim collective life and individual obligations in Islam. We sense strongly in this section his leadership in articulating God's laws to the nascent community in Medina. Likewise, one notices a similarity between his situation, having just successfully led the group of believers out from a dangerous place, and that of Moses in Sinai. Both leaders now transmit a code from God to a community freed from pagan rule and able to govern itself. In this particular case, the code clarifies how to live righteously and also affords the believers mental comfort in the event of transgression. For, as one finds, while this section consists of God's commands, and hence leaves no room for noncompliance, it simultaneously emphasizes His mercy. Rhyme clauses stressing this aspect occur seven times (182, 192, 199, 218, 225, 226, 235),¹² reassuring the Muslim that God knows human frailty and forgives.

Furthermore, we may notice in B' indications of the tense times of the revelatory period, in the messages about jihad and the references to the Muslims being fought at the Ka‘ba and during the month of pilgrimage (191, 194; cf. 217). M. A. S. Abdel Haleem recently has made a careful study of these and other passages in the Qur'an relating to jihad, which have often been taken from context. He finds that:

Military jihad [there being another sense of the word: to strive in the face of something or someone else, as against temptations of the soul] is prescribed only for self-defence and defence of the oppressed. It serves the function of *daf'* [driving back evil forces], without which, as the Qur'an says, *the earth would be corrupted and houses of worship wherein God's name is mentioned would be destroyed*. The Qur'an sets very stringent conditions and limitations for fighting, which is to be carried out by the Islamic state.

In the particular context of these verses, as he observes,

The Muslims were hesitant about fighting back in the Sanctuary, considering it a serious offence. So the Qur'an sought to remove this sense of guilt by stating, "the persecution they inflict on you for believing is more serious than your killing them in the sanctuary for self-defence," just the same as it said about fighting back against aggressors during a sacred month (2:217).

Moreover, he points out that the verses in question abound in qualifications and in restraining language that appeals forcefully to the conscience. Looking carefully at this passage, then, which concerns the Ka'ba and the pilgrimage, one finds that "the Muslims should not initiate fighting or fight non-combatants, be disproportionate in their response, or continue to fight when the enemy has stopped."¹³

In the central verses of this section, there is a call on the believers to enter Islam wholeheartedly. One perceives here a sharp contrast between what is required of believers and the attitude shown by the Children of Israel. The Children of Israel were skeptical when Moses related that they must sacrifice a cow, and they obeyed the command finally only half-heartedly. Also, verse 211 brings to mind how many clear signs were sent to the Children of Israel that were not believed (as indicated above, according to the Qur'an, the Israelites' tendency to disbelieve prophets was a spiritual fault of theirs). In short, the Muslims should not be like them. In these verses the believers are also warned of the severe trials ahead and of the suffering and adversity—suggesting, first and foremost, the conflict with the Meccans. The believers are told, meanwhile, that God's help is near.

A' (243-86)

Like the other sections in the second half of the chapter, section A' consists of a large ring. It opens with a reminder of those who left their homes by the thousands for fear of death (apparently a reference to the Children of Israel; the situation compares to that of the Muslims, who were driven out of Mecca), and with a call to fight in God's cause. We remember that the Muslims at this time were a small band of believers, up against an adversary that continued to threaten them. Yet, as the text discloses, *If God did not drive back one set of people by means of another, the earth would be thoroughly corrupted*. The Muslims are called upon to retaliate against the formidable Meccans, who

continued to hold the Ka‘ba and defile it. In this context, the story of the Israelites’ defeat of the Philistines and David’s slaying of Goliath, part of the Israelites’ struggle to reclaim their ark (246-51), is inspiring. The story encourages the Muslims in their struggle against the Meccans (as in 249: *How often has a small force defeated a large one with God’s permission!*). Despite the odds, therefore, the Muslims can take courage: Just as the Israelites reclaimed their ark, so might the Muslims regain the Ka‘ba.

The last section also deals with the subject of spending wealth in God’s cause—it being understood that military campaigns need to be financed. This leads to parables about charity, and to instructions about debts and warnings about usury. In addition, the section stresses God’s infinite knowledge. In the passage concerning principally charity and financial transactions, for example, rhyme phrases refer to God’s complete knowledge seven times (261, 265, 268, 271, 273, 282, 283).

The middle part of the last section begins with the majestic Throne Verse (255) describing God in all His power and might. It is a classic statement of Islamic monotheism: Everything in the heavens and on earth belongs to Him, and no one can intercede with Him except by His permission. His Throne extends over all in the heavens and on earth. In the verse, too, one finds a response to the idea that God rested on the seventh day. Slumber never overtakes God, nor does He ever feel fatigue in preserving His creation. *He is the Exalted, the Great*, the verse concludes.¹⁴ The following verse then provides a stunning juxtaposition. Despite what has just been affirmed about God, we are informed here that *There is no compulsion in religion: Truth has been made distinct from Error*. This verse emphasizes free will. Despite God’s all-surpassing vastness and authority, individual persons are left to decide for themselves whether or not to believe. The contrast here may well put one in mind of the reference to the gnat from the center of A. In both cases, whether between God and the similitude of a gnat, or between His authority and the free will of an individual person, the opposition in scale is extreme.

The next verse assures the believers that God is their Protector, the One Who will bring them from Darkness to Light (false gods, on the other hand, will bring the disbelievers from Light into Darkness). Other verses in the middle of A’ deal with Abraham. Abraham is represented as arguing with a haughty king who tells him that, like Abraham’s God, he may confer life or death. Abraham confounds the king by saying that God causes the sun to rise from the east and by challenging him to raise the sun from the west if he wields God’s power. The

last verse in the middle of A' represents Abraham as asking God to show him how He will resurrect the dead. Abraham is instructed to train four birds to home and then to put them on four separate hills and call out to them. So God will resurrect souls. Again, one notices correspondences between this central part of A' and the center of A, in the argumentation with disbelievers about creation and resurrection—here, by Abraham, and earlier, by the Prophet—and in the reference to God's signs.

In conclusion, we find that [Chapter 2](#) of the Qur'an exhibits organic unity in the form of clear concentric patterning. The overall structure of the chapter may be simplified as follows:

- A Believers vs. disbelievers; Prophet challenges disbelievers to produce a *sura*; God gives life and resurrests
- B Moses delivers law to Children of Israel; Children of Israel reluctant to sacrifice cow
- C Abraham was tested; Ka'ba built by Abraham and Ishmael; prayer that descendants submit to God
- D Ka'ba is the new prayer direction; this is a test of faith; compete in doing good deeds
- C' Muslims will be tested; instructions about pilgrimage to Mecca; warning not to worship ancestors' multiple gods
- B' Prophet delivers law to Muslims; Muslims exhorted to enter Islam wholeheartedly
- A' Believers encouraged in struggle vs. disbelievers; Abraham challenges king to affect rising of sun; God gives life and resurrests

Moreover, the correspondence of section centers, discussed above, highlights the similarities between the situations of both Abraham and Moses on the one hand, and the contemporary situation of the Prophet on the other. The experiences of Abraham and Moses may be understood, after the insight of Dmitry Frolov, as “prototypes”, or historical events taken as pan-historical patterns symbolically repeated in the new circumstances.”¹⁵ The Qur'an's comparison, by way of

structure, of their experiences to Muhammad's serves to underscore the continuity among prophets.

In addition, one observes the connection between the beginning of [Chapter 2](#) and its end (verses 2-5 and 285-86). Namely, both sequences of verses concern believers and the matter of faith. This connection binds the chapter together and provides a sense of closure. We might add that the theme of faith is also notable in the middle of the chapter, in the adjuration not to doubt but to follow the Prophet and face Mecca in prayer. Al-Razi (d. 606/1209), one of the first exegetes to call attention to this link between the beginning of the chapter and its end, was prompted at the conclusion of *The Cow* to remark:

Whoever meditates on the subtleties of the composition of this *sura* and on its marvelous organization will acknowledge that the Qur'an, inimitable in the eloquence of its expression and the nobility of its meanings, is also inimitable in the organization and the composition of its verses. Perhaps this is what those who commented on the inimitability of its style meant. I note, however, that the commentators all avoid these subtleties and pay no attention to these hidden things. Should we not say here, "The eyes underestimate the star's dimension. This is due to the eye, not to the star's smallness!"¹⁶

Finally, we observe how the concentric order has the effect of bringing out universal messages in the chapter. Michel Cuypers, in fact, has discovered the same principle at work in [Chapter 5](#), *The Table*. Central passages in *The Cow*, as we have seen, highlight rewards and punishments following death, urge wholehearted belief, stress monotheism, and state that God's help is near. And the very center of the chapter orients the faithful, distinguishing Muslims as a new median community.¹⁷ Yet at the same time, the text downplays the importance of their specific prayer direction. Here the Qur'an affirms that all people, regardless of their prayer direction or spiritual orientation, should vie in goodness and God will bring them together.

Three: Chapter Pairs I

In this chapter we will discuss the second major organizational principle evident in the Qur'an, after the principle of the chapter as a unity, namely, that chapters tend to occur in pairs. The idea of pairing, as it applies to God's creation, finds frequent expression in the Qur'an. For example, 36:36 glorifies Him *Who created all the pairs of what the earth produces, as well as of their human kind [male and female] and of other things beyond their ken* (even the numerical reference here, 36:36, seems to indicate pairing); and 65:12 points to cosmic pairing in God's creation: seven layers of heaven and seven layers of earth—all through which His command descends. Indeed, we are urged to contemplate the principle of pairing, as in 51:49: *Of everything we have created pairs, so that you may take heed.*¹

It has long been recognized that some Qur'anic chapters occur as pairs, as evidenced in designations such as "The Two Prayers of Refuge" (*al-Mu'awwidhatan*) and "The Two Luminous Chapters" (*al-Zahrawan*). Yet only in the modern period, thanks to Islahi (d. 1997), have scholars noticed that pairing is in fact a major structural feature in the text, one manifest through the whole Qur'an. Islahi has discovered that the majority of Qur'anic chapters form pairs with adjacent chapters. According to Islahi, a pair consists of two adjacent chapters that bear significant thematic and structural correspondences to each other.² The recurring idea is that two independent wholes exist together, in relation to one another, together forming a new unit. Recently, on the basis of detailed rhetorical analysis, Cuypers has confirmed that the last thirty chapters of the Qur'an indeed exist as pairs. Below, we will examine how this principle works in reference both to a short pair and a long pair. We will then conclude our discussion of pairing in the next chapter, considering a medium pair (later in our study, three other medium pairs will also be analyzed as components of a single group of Qur'anic chapters). For review of all the chapter pairs in the Qur'an, the reader may consult [Appendix B](#).

We will begin by examining two short chapters, 113 and 114, the two

Prayers of Refuge (*al-Mu‘awwidhatan*). Here is their translation:

113: *The Daybreak*

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate:

- 1 Say, I seek refuge with the Lord of daybreak,
- 2 From the evil of what He has created,
- 3 From the evil of darkness when it descends,
- 4 From the evil of the women who blow on knots,
- 5 From the evil of an envier when he envies.

114: *People*

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate:

- 6 Say, I seek refuge with the Lord of people,
- 7 King of people,
- 8 God of people,
- 9 From the evil of the slinking whisperer,
- 10 Who whispers in the hearts of people,
- 11 Of jinn and humankind.

These two early Meccan chapters bear a thematic resemblance, clearly complementing one another. The first invokes God's protection against harm coming from without, whereas the second invokes His protection against that coming from within, as both the classical commentator al-Biqā‘i and Yusuf ‘Ali from the last century have noted.³ Specifically, *The Daybreak* asks for God's protection from harm existing in nature, indicated by the reference to darkness, and from malignant wishes from other people, be they sorceresses or enviers (female ill-wishers in the first case, male in the second). *People*, on the other hand, asks for God's protection from Satan, the insidious, slinking whisperer who puts doubts and wrong motives in the hearts of people and tries to lead them astray. We might add that one finds here that the Qur'an, after providing guidance in the body of the text (Chapters 2-112), ends on a note of vigilance.

The last two chapters remind us of the presence of evil in the world, evil that remains constantly a threat; they invoke God's protection against it.

Structurally, we find that these two chapters are complementary as well. They are both short prayers consisting of two elements: the opening formula (*Say, I seek refuge with . . .*) and the subsequent reference to harm (*From the evil of . . .*). Furthermore, as al-Razi has perceived, the two chapters mirror each other, being chiastic. Thus in Chapter 113 one attribute is specified for God at the opening and then the threats are three, while in Chapter 114 three attributes are specified for God and then the threat is one.⁴ Stepping back, we see clearly that, both in terms of structure and theme, the final two chapters of the Qur'an constitute a pair.

We will now examine an example of a long pair, [Chapters 2 and 3](#), the two Luminous Chapters (*al-Zahrawan*). Their complementarity has been observed during the classical period by such figures as al-Suyuti and Ibn 'Aqila and recently by Islahi and Robinson.⁵ As these scholars point out, both chapters were revealed in Medina during the prolonged debate with Jews and Christians about fundamental beliefs. Accordingly, [Chapter 2](#) deals especially with the contentions of Jews, whereas [Chapter 3](#) deals especially with contentions of Christians; as a pair, they respond to arguments by the People of the Book. Likewise, both chapters address the nascent Muslim community at a time of struggle against the Meccan polytheists. [Chapter 2](#) encourages the Muslims for battle, while [Chapter 3](#) highlights the lessons from the first two significant engagements—Badr (2/624) and Uhud (3/625); as a pair, they deal with early confrontations in the enterprise to liberate the Ka'ba. In addition, we find that both chapters are organized concentrically and consist of seven sections. What is more, the seven sections in each chapter, besides contributing integrally to that chapter's coherence, correspond to their counterparts in the other chapter.

We will next go through the individual sections of [Chapter 3](#), *The Family of 'Imran*. In the process, we will highlight both how they contribute to that chapter, and also how they exist in relationship with the sections of the preceding chapter.

A (1-30)

The Family of 'Imran, like *The Cow*, begins with the letters ALM.⁶ The text goes on to state in verses 3 and 4 that God has sent down the Scripture to the Prophet, confirming the Torah and the Gospel that came before. Similar to the

Qur'an, these previous Scriptures had been sent down as guidance for people. This message about the previous Scriptures in 3:3-4 compares to the statement about the Qur'an as guidance in 2:2. We may remark also that the message finds expression elsewhere in the Qur'an, as in 5:44 and 5:46: *We have revealed the Torah. In it there is guidance and light.* And: *We have revealed to him [Jesus the son of Mary] the Gospel. In it there is guidance and light.* Such passages highlight the truth inherent in the older Scriptures, coming as they do from a Single Source. Concerning this message in the Qur'an, Cyril Glassé has rightly commented that "the fact that one revelation should name others as authentic is an extraordinary event in the history of religions."⁷ Regarding structure, likewise we see that the first section of *The Family of 'Imran* compares to the first section of *The Cow*, in that both are tripartite (see [Appendix A](#) for a structural view).

The center of this first section refers to the amazing military victory at Badr, a place southwest of Medina on the coast road by the Red Sea, where some three hundred Muslims led by the Prophet surprised and overwhelmed a thousand Meccans. In the middle part also (v. 11) reference is made to the fate of Pharaoh and his host, who pursued Moses and the Israelites from Egypt and then were suddenly drowned in the Red Sea. At Badr, the Meccans' military commander Abu Jahl perished, and within a week of hearing of the defeat, Abu Lahab, their tribal leader and fierce opponent of the Prophet, died in Mecca. One may discern a parallel between the Prophet's own experience and that of an earlier prophet, here again, Moses. These defeats indicate God's terrible punishment of disbelievers, just as they indicate how God supports whom He chooses. The punishment foreshadows what awaits the disbelievers in the Afterlife; God's intervention, meanwhile, signifies favor of the righteous. As the middle part goes on to affirm, for those who forebear in the face of adversity, speak truthfully, worship devoutly, spend in God's cause, pray for forgiveness and acknowledge that God has no equals, they will find awaiting them Gardens, with rivers flowing beneath and pure companions, and God's good pleasure.

We notice furthermore in this first section a structural tie from the last section of [Chapter 2](#). Specifically, the declaration at the center of 2:A'—from the Throne Verse—is repeated at the beginning of 3:A: *God: there is no god but Him, the Living, the Eternal* (2:255 and 3:2). One may perceive a further connection between these sections in that [Chapter 2](#) ends with a prayer for help against the disbelievers, who were numerous and mighty, and in the middle of this section we find an example of an answer to prayer. Hence, while this first

section compares to its counterpart A in *The Cow*, as we have said above, we also see that it is tied firmly with A', the last section of that chapter.

B (31-63)

Section B concerns the claims of Christians and Islam's difference with Christianity. The focus is on Jesus' birth and message. Once more, as in [Chapter 2](#), the title of the chapter, *The Family of 'Imran*, is taken from this section. Mary descended from 'Imran, and Jesus was born to Mary. Even though he did not have a human father, Jesus belongs by lineage, therefore, to the Family of 'Imran.⁸ Like Jesus, John the Baptist was conceived miraculously, to very old Zachariah and his barren wife. Adam was created from dust, yet another miraculous beginning (cf. the comparison of Jesus to Adam in verse 59). These examples demonstrate that God may certainly bring forth humans divinely, by command. But that does not mean that, with respect to the position held by Christians, God is the Father of Jesus.⁹ Jesus, though immaculately conceived and empowered to work miracles, is still human.

The center of Section B (48-54) concerns Jesus' mission on earth and his message. By God's leave, he was able to perform miracles such as healing the blind and raising the dead. He was inspired with the Gospel, which was a confirmation of the Torah that had come before it. And he was sent to make lawful to the Children of Israel part of what had been forbidden (cf. 3:93: *All food was lawful to the Children of Israel, except what Israel forbade himself before the Torah was revealed*). The Children of Israel had become much concerned with upholding the law, at the expense of its spirit (by way of example, one is reminded here of the response of those around Moses at his call to sacrifice a cow), and Jesus came to restore the balance. Above all, Jesus brought the message of a prophet: that people should return to the Straight Path. They should fear God and worship Him, his Lord and their Lord. Most hearers rejected Jesus. Yet some people—the Disciples—followed Jesus and obeyed him, submitting to God.

C (64-99)

This section calls the Jews and Christians to a common position with the Muslims, that they worship God only, ascribe to Him no partner, and take none but Him as Lord. The section deals next with Abraham as the common ancestor to the three faiths. Abraham was not a Jew or a Christian, the text affirms (he

preceded Judaism and Christianity, coming before the revelation of the Torah and the Gospel¹⁰). Rather, Abraham was a devout monotheist. So why, the Qur'an asks, do Jews and Christians seek differences with Muslims about him? The closest to Abraham, without doubt, are those who follow him, such as the Prophet and those who believe. The Qur'an appeals to the People of the Book, urging harmony with Muslims and promoting understanding from these communities instead of argumentation. At the same time, it calls for recognition of Islam as squarely within the Abrahamic monotheistic tradition.

Structurally, one finds a clear correspondence between this section and the third section of [Chapter 2](#). Here, in the middle of the section, there occurs a repeat, almost verbatim, of the statement from the last part of 2:C. This statement is the creed of Islam, which declares that the Muslims believe in what God has revealed to Muhammad and all the prophets before, that they make no distinctions among them (again, unlike the Christians in their exaltation of Jesus), and that they submit themselves to God.

D (100-109)

The central section is addressed to the believers and emphasizes holding together and remaining steadfast. In relation to this idea of cohesion, there occurs a reference (v. 103) to the profound social change brought about by Islam. Prior to Islam, tribalism had existed in the Arabian Peninsula as the social model. Kinship determined the group, and outsiders could not join a particular tribe except as protected charges, which meant for these individuals an inferior social status. Moreover, the tribes were continually fighting each other and vying for precedence. Islam changed the model fundamentally in that blood ties were replaced by a single bond of faith. Superseding the smaller, exclusive entity of the tribe was a larger, inclusive religious community; competing groups were subsumed in a larger whole. What is more, the religious community welcomed new members as equals (cf. 49:13: *O people, We have created you male and female, and have made you into nations and tribes that you may come to know one another. Verily, the most noble among you in the sight of God are the most pious.*). Believers are called in this section to hold fast together to God's rope in the face of military challenges abroad and continued efforts by Jews and Christians in Medina to pull them from their belief. *Do not split into factions*, verse 103 warns. In the center of this chapter, we find a call to unity.

Furthermore, as in the middle section of [Chapter 2](#), there is an emphasis here

on community identity (one will recall that the center of *The Cow* indicates the new prayer direction for Muslims and situates Islam as a new median religious community). In this case, the very middle verse of *The Family of ‘Imran* (v. 104) highlights the desired characteristics of the new group of believers. Muslims are to stand out as a community that bids to acts of charity, one that promotes good and deters evil. Such as them will be the ones who are successful, the Qur'an indicates, such as them will earn God's favor.

Section C' (110-17)

Like section C' of [Chapter 2](#), this relatively short transitional section concerns the People of the Book as well as those who disbelieve. It points to the stern consequences for those who reject faith. In the central verses, though, the text affirms that among the People of the Book there are righteous people, those who believe in God and enjoin right action and forbid wrong and hasten to do good works. For the good that they do, they too will have their reward in the Afterlife (vv. 113-15). This idea of salvation as being attainable for non-Muslims, corresponds to the one from 2:62, at a middle place of 2:B. The same theme occurs also in a central part of [Chapter 5](#) (v. 69).¹¹ One encounters this non-restrictive idea of salvation again and again; it is one of the repeated core messages of the Qur'an.

B' (118-79)

This long section, like B' of [Chapter 2](#), deals with the military struggle against the Meccans (compare the passages about jihad in 2:B'). It concerns the lessons of Uhud, which took place one year after Badr, when about a thousand Muslims faced a Meccan army of three thousand at Mount Uhud outside of Medina. Shortly before the battle, however, ‘Abd Allah ibn Ubayy, the head of the Khazraj tribe, withdrew his men to Medina—these previously had indicated their commitment to Muhammad—leaving the Muslim fighters at Uhud numbering roughly seven hundred. They were positioned with the mountain behind them and to their right, to their left being a hill on which the Prophet had stationed archers, while in front of them stood the Meccan forces. Early engagements resulted in the Meccans being driven back, yet when the archers descended to advance on the foe, against orders from the Prophet, they left the Muslims' left flank open. Khalid ibn al-Walid (who would later convert and become a great general for Islam), seized this opportunity and took a contingent of cavalry

around the mountain. They emerged suddenly at the Muslims' left side and charged. Chaos ensued, and many of the Muslim fighters were killed, and the Prophet himself was wounded. The Muslims retreated up the mountain (a small number were cut off and tried to escape to Medina, though most were killed). The Meccans, whose primary force consisted of cavalry, did not pursue the Muslims up the slopes. Their leader Abu Sufyan declared victory for the polytheists and then took his army back to Mecca.¹²

The Qur'an in this section states that the battle was meant to distinguish the true believers from the hypocrites. It also encourages the Muslims, who surely felt disheartened after the military setback and the loss of many of their brethren. It reminds them that if they suffered a defeat, then likewise the disbelievers had suffered one at Badr. Moreover, they should not expect to enter Paradise without being tested. The section also reminds the believers of the Prophet's mortality. As for those who disobeyed, they brought the defeat upon themselves—but God has now forgiven them. Toward the end of the section, the believers are urged again not to anguish, for if they die fighting in God's cause, they are gathered unto Him. The section concludes by affirming once more that by such a trial God separates the true believers from the hypocrites, good from evil, and by calling on people to believe in God and to do good.

In the center of this section, we note a correspondence with B, insofar as Jesus' message and the one brought by Muhammad are essentially the same. Jesus calls people to the Straight Path. He tells them to fear God, to obey Jesus and worship God, his Lord and their Lord. In the middle of this section, similarly we find a command for the believers to fear God, to obey God and His Prophet that they may obtain mercy. Moreover, in the Disciples' embracing of Jesus' message, despite its rejection by those around them, there is an example for the Muslims.¹³

A' (180-200)

The last section deals with spending wealth in God's cause, a theme that figures in much of the last section of *The Cow* (it being understood, as stated above, that the ongoing struggle with the pagans needed to be financed). And like 2:A', which refers to the triumph of David over Goliath, this concluding section provides final encouragement to the Muslims. The Muslims should not be deceived by the strutting of the disbelievers. The Muslims will be tested in their possessions and selves, but if they remain pious and steadfast, that will be the

deciding factor.

The middle verses affirm that to God belongs all, and that God has heard those who remember Him, those who contemplate the wonders of creation and believe in Him and pray for forgiveness, asking to be joined with the righteous. The last of these verses contains God's answer: '*Never will I let go to waste the good work done by any of you, whether male or female: The one is like the other. So those who emigrated or were expelled from their homes [cf. v. 243 of 2:A'] or suffered harm for My sake, or fought or were killed—I will wipe away their sins and admit them to Gardens with rivers flowing beneath.*' Like section A of this chapter, section A' features in the middle an answer to prayer.

After stating once more that some People of the Book will too be rewarded (v. 199), *The Family of 'Imran* closes by calling on the believers to be steadfast, to strengthen each other and to fear God, so that they may be successful. Al-Suyuti has noted that this last verse points to the beginning of the preceding chapter, to *those who fear God and the successful ones* in verses 2 and 5 of *The Cow*.¹⁴ This last structural tie, the connection between the end of 3 and the beginning of 2, further binds the two chapters together.

In conclusion, we find this long chapter, *The Family of 'Imran*, to be another example of coherence. Here is a simplified diagram of its structure:

- A Qur'an as confirmation of previous Scriptures; Badr as a sign from God; Gardens await those who fear God; call to pray for forgiveness and remain steadfast
- B Jesus belongs to the Family of 'Imran; he performs miracles and calls people to worship God; Disciples obey him and submit to God
- C Call on Jews and Christians to an agreement with Muslims that they worship God only; Abraham was neither Jew nor Christian, but a devout monotheist; the closest in relation to Abraham are those who follow him
- D Exhortation of believers to fear God and hold fast together; call for the emergence of a community that bids to acts of charity, promotes good, and deters evil
- C' Most People of the Book have drawn upon themselves God's wrath, as have disbelievers; some People of the Book recite God's verses and worship Him; they will be rewarded for their good deeds

B' Uhud distinguishes hypocrites from believers; disbelievers suffered a worse defeat at Badr; Muslims cannot expect to enter Paradise without being tested; disobedience brings loss at Uhud; God has now forgiven those who disobeyed; Muhammad is mortal (like Jesus before him); believers should fear God and obey His Prophet that they may attain mercy

A' Believers exhorted to spend in God's cause; God answers prayers for forgiveness: He promises admittance to Gardens for good works and for what believers have suffered in His cause; some People of the Book will be rewarded; call on believers to be steadfast, to strengthen each other and to fear God

Considering the whole chapter, we notice especially the connection between the first section, the middle, and the last in the exhortation of believers to be steadfast and to hold firmly together. This call for unity and strength, while of course applicable to all times, was particularly apt during the period of revelation—after the military breakdown at Uhud and when the established communities of Jews and Christians were trying to pull the Muslims to their sides. Also, we see again the stress on a universal message in the very center of the chapter. Here, we encounter the call for a community to emerge that bids to acts of charity, one that promotes good and deters evil.

From a wider perspective, we see moreover how *The Family of 'Imran* combines with *The Cow* to form a cohesive pair. We have pointed out in our discussion many thematic links between the chapters. And structurally, as we have observed, they both consist of seven sections that, besides contributing to the individual chapter's ring, also relate to their counterparts in the adjacent chapter. In addition, the chapters are bound tightly together, both at their intersection (by the repeat from 2:255 in 3:2; and by the reference to an answer to prayer from the last verse of 2:A', where God's help is implored, occurring in the center of 3:A through the example of Badr) and at their ends (by the repeat from 2:2,5 in 3:200). Like Chapters 113 and 114, as one finds, [Chapters 2 and 3](#) integrally complement each other.

Four: Chapter Pairs II

In the previous chapter we dealt with two examples of pairs, one short and one long. In this chapter we will examine a medium-length pair, Chapters 12 and 13, *Joseph* and *Thunder*. In addition, our last chapter will refer to three more examples of medium-length pairs in the course of a discussion of a chapter group. For a review of all the chapter pairs, as we have indicated, the reader may consult [Appendix B](#).

Chapters 12 and 13 were revealed during the late Meccan period, a time of persecution of the Muslims and scornful verbal challenges to the Prophet. Even before this period, the pagans had begun targeting individual converts to Islam. For example, they tortured Bilal ibn Rabah, who was a slave at the time, and ‘Ammar ibn Yasir, and they killed Summaya bint Khayyat and Yasir ibn ‘Amir. In 619, however, the situation turned yet worse when Abu Talib, the Prophet’s uncle and a clan leader of Mecca, died in his old age. He had been extending the clan’s protection to Muhammad, and now the clan leadership passed to Abu Lahab, a fierce opponent of the Prophet. Meanwhile, on the verbal front, the Meccans were remaining incredulous at what the Prophet was saying and scoffing at him. The chapters address this rhetorical situation by highlighting different kinds of evidence, as Islahi has noted.¹ The first points to an instance of God’s intervention in human affairs, whereas the second points to signs of God in nature, ones in heaven and on earth. Together they indicate the almighty power of the One God and provide a stern warning to disbelievers. In addition, they contain a particularly hopeful message at this juncture to the beleaguered Muslims. Moreover, the two chapters are paired structurally, as we shall outline below. Let us begin by looking at the first chapter of the pair, *Joseph*.

Joseph consists of three sections: a Prologue, the story of Joseph in the middle, and an Epilogue. Ever since the classical period, commentators have noted the connection between the opening and the closing verses, and recently, numerous scholars have highlighted the chiastic pattern in the chapter. Our analysis below aims to build upon the work of predecessors, identifying

especially the prevalence of concentric patterns within the chapter itself and further illuminating the chapter's key themes.

A/Prologue (1-3)

The Prologue states that God sends down His revelation, in the form of an Arabic Qur'an, so that people may become wise, and that He relates to the Prophet the best of stories. Of course, this story of Joseph is a familiar one from the Book of Genesis. Yet when considering the story here, we do well to bear in mind Marilyn Waldman's seminal essay, "New Approaches to the 'Biblical' Materials in the Qur'an." Waldman cautions us about evaluating narratives in the Qur'an in reference to *Urtexts*, that is, original, fundamental narratives from which others may be derived. A reader or listener, reflecting on the existence of what is believed to be an *Urtext*, naturally tends to place another telling in a "dependency relationship, to see it as a 'version,' as something passed on in altered, if not debased, form." Citing the work of literary scholar Barbara Hernnstein Smith, Waldman writes that, to the contrary, "no telling of a story is more basic than any other(s), and originals do not really exist." The materials and forms of a story are tailored to suit their specific contexts. Indeed, as Abdel Haleem has found by comparing the Biblical and the Qur'anic stories, the one in Genesis constitutes part of the national history of the Jews. It comes after the stories of Esau and Jacob and details how the Jews came to leave Canaan for Egypt. The Joseph story in the Qur'an, on the other hand, is placed in a chapter on its own and does not relate a national history (thus, for example, the lack of individual names for people: all but Joseph, Jacob, and their forefathers Abraham and Isaac are anonymous). The story is recounted in Arabic, but it may easily apply to all peoples.² The telling here then is different, not derivative; it is a vision of what happened to Joseph situated in a different scriptural context. And in the Qur'an, as we shall see below, the story is revealed in such a way as to put special emphasis on the prophetic message of Joseph and the role of forgiveness in bringing about family reunions.

B/Joseph Story

a (4-7)

Section B begins with Joseph telling his father, Jacob, that he has had a dream in which he saw eleven stars and the sun and moon bowing down before him. Since Joseph has eleven brothers, his father grasps that the stars represent them (the

sun and moon, though not addressed in the father's reply, may be taken to signify Joseph's parents, the moon representing his mother). Jacob instructs Joseph not to tell his dream to his brothers, lest they plot against him. He adds that God will teach him the interpretation of dreams and perfect His blessing upon him and upon the Family of Jacob, as He has previously perfected it upon Abraham and Isaac.

b (8-19)

This second part of the story concerns the brothers' successful plotting to get rid of Joseph. They are jealous that he and his other brother (the youngest one, according to the commentators) are their father's favorites. Jacob is wary and feels uneasy that they should take Joseph outdoors for enjoyment and play, as they say, despite the brothers' assurances of protection (presumably the other brother is too immature to be brought along). This part, dealing with the brothers' treachery, may be summarized as follows:³

8-10 Brothers confer about Joseph; one suggests killing him or banishing him to a foreign land; another suggests throwing him down a well, where he may be picked up by a **caravan party**

11-14 Brothers assure father that they will watch over Joseph; father worries that a wolf may devour him when they are not watching

15 Brothers agree to cast Joseph in a well; God reveals to Joseph that he will one day tell his brothers the truth of this matter while they are unaware

16-18 Brothers, in tears, tell father that a wolf devoured Joseph; they show him his shirt bloodied; father disbelieves them and asserts that patience is most fitting for him

19 **Caravan party** passes by well and finds Joseph; they take him and conceal him like an item of merchandise

c (20-22)

Part c involves Joseph's arrival in Egypt and his settling there. The caravanners hold him in low estimation and sell him for a miserable price, a few silver dirhams only. The Egyptian man who buys him, however, sees his potential and tells his wife that they shall honor him in their house and perhaps one day adopt

him. Joseph matures and grows stronger, and God fills him with wisdom.

d (23-35)

Part d features two attempts at seduction by the lady of the house. With God's help, Joseph resists them both. Prominent in the center of this part is the husband's bid for Joseph to overlook his wife's perfidy and for his wife to ask forgiveness. Here is a diagram of this part:

23-24 Wife closes doors and beckons Joseph; **Joseph would desire her, but he sees the evidence of his Lord, and God turns him from shameful action**

25-27 Wife chases Joseph and rips his shirt; husband is encountered by the door; wife suggests prison or painful punishment for Joseph; Joseph objects that she tried to seduce him; member of household suggests determining whether shirt is torn from front or back⁴

28-29 Husband sees shirt is torn from back and concludes that this is another of snares of women; husband says to Joseph: disregard incident; he says to wife: ask forgiveness

30-32 Ladies of city remark that wife has become enamored of young slave; wife invites them to house for banquet and supplies knives for feast; wife calls Joseph to appear; he does so, and ladies cut their hands (out of distraction and desire); wife warns Joseph that if he will not submit to her commands, then he will be cast into prison

33-35 **Joseph would incline to the women, but God turns him away from their snares**; men of city, after having seen the signs, consider it prudent to imprison Joseph

e (36-49)

In the center of the story, we find Joseph within the city's prison, relating a pithy sermon to his two cellmates and interpreting their dreams. Here Joseph appears clearly as a prophet, explaining visions about what shall come and guiding people to the right religion—worship of the One God. Also, to the interpretation of the second dream he adds a hopeful conclusion. This positive turn at the end of the middle part may be taken to indicate that the Joseph story, at the closing of its ring, may likewise have a happy ending.

The middle part of the story consists of a ring containing three elements. Furthermore, the last element itself has a concentric form. The structure of the middle part of the story is as follows:

36 Two young men enter prison with Joseph; one dreams of himself carrying wine, the other dreams of himself carrying bread over his head while birds eat from it; **they ask Joseph to interpret their dreams**

37-40 Joseph first tells his cellmates about religion: he has abandoned the ways of disbelievers and follows the religion of his forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; question to prison mates: are many different gods better than God the One, the Almighty? Joseph informs them: God has commanded you to worship none but Him

41-49 **Joseph interprets dreams for prison mates and king** (this element, a ring in itself, is detailed below)

41 **Joseph interprets dreams for prison mates**: one will pour wine for his master, the other will be crucified and birds will eat from his head

42 Joseph asks of the prison mate soon to be freed to mention him to his master; Satan makes the man forget and so Joseph lingers in prison for several years

43-44 King has dreamt of seven fat cows being eaten by seven lean ones and of seven green ears of corn and seven withered ones; **king asks advisors to interpret his dream but they cannot**

45 Prisoner who has been freed remembers Joseph and says that he (the king's attendant) will provide interpretation; he asks to be sent for that purpose

46-49 Former prisoner relates king's dream and asks Joseph to interpret it; **Joseph interprets king's dream**: seven bountiful years will come during which people should take a little of the harvest for sustenance and store the rest, and that these years will be followed by seven hard years during which people should eat from their stores, except for a small reserve; Joseph adds that afterward there will come a year of abundant rain during which people will press grapes

d' (50-53)

The second half of the story is dominated by the theme of forgiveness. Joseph is called from prison, but he will not go and appear before the king until he has been cleared of suspicion. He asks about the ladies who cut their hands. The king summons them, and they attest that they know no evil of him. The Egyptian man's wife, in whose house he formerly resided, then admits that she was the one who tried to seduce him and that Joseph is blameless. She says this so that her husband may know that she was not unfaithful to him in his absence; she claims not so much as to be innocent, but that the soul is wont to incite to evil. She ends her testimony by saying that God is most merciful and forgiving (we will observe this theme stressed again in part b' below).⁵

c' (54-57)

In part c', the king again calls for Joseph and declares that he would like for Joseph to serve him personally, his trustworthiness now assured. Joseph requests to be made guardian over the storehouses of the land, so he may prudently manage them. In this way, as the text affirms, God established Joseph as a person with authority in the land.

b' (58-98)

This part consists of three concentric elements. Each is organized around a ploy involving the returning caravan, be it the concealment in the saddlebags of the brothers' bartered goods in the first element, the placement in one brother's baggage of the king's drinking cup in the second, or the sending back of Joseph's shirt among the brothers in the third.⁶ These elements are parallel; one notes in them, in addition to the inclusion of a device or trick, a similar structure: each element begins with the brothers' arrival in Joseph's presence, centers on the returning caravan carrying unexpected contents, and ends with Jacob taking action, either sending his sons back to Egypt (twice) or going there himself with the whole family (at the end). Likewise, numerous correspondences exist between this part as a whole and the earlier part b, such as the theme of traveling to Egypt, that of concealment in a caravan's load, that of attempting to deceive Jacob and of his disbelief, and that of betraying Joseph.

Regarding the themes in this part, one notices in particular the stress on forgiveness. We recall that Joseph was twice betrayed by the Egyptian's wife when she blamed him for attempting to seduce her and when she ordered him to submit to her desires before the ladies of the city, yet she admits her wrongdoing thereafter and seeks God's forgiveness. The theme of forgiveness recurs twice in

part b'. From b, we recall that the brothers tried to deceive Jacob about Joseph's disappearance; here they blame their other brother's absence (the father's other favorite) upon that brother's having committed theft abroad, yet ultimately at the end of this part Jacob says he will ask God's forgiveness for them. And we remember that Joseph was betrayed ruthlessly by his brothers when they cast him in a well; in the center of this part, after the king's drinking cup has been discovered, Joseph is betrayed by his brothers a second time when they remember before him that they once had another brother who stole (not knowing whom they are addressing!). Yet after they admit their wrongdoing to him, he says that no reproach be upon them that day and wishes God's forgiveness for them.

One might add that the Prophet Muhammad, on a momentous occasion, evidently took this message to heart. It is said on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas that, when Mecca was falling to the Muslims 8/630, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab indicated there would be stern revenge for the people of the city. The Prophet, however, was clement and quoted to them from verse 92 (*Let there be no reproach on you this day*).⁷ Instead of punishing the Meccans, in recompense for turning on him when he was in their midst and for all their subsequent hostility, he welcomed them into Islam.

The three elements of b' may be summarized as follows:

58-61 Brothers enter into Joseph's presence unwittingly, while he recognizes them; he instructs them to return with a brother of theirs, as Joseph is the best of hosts; should they refuse, he will not give them corn nor allow them to approach again; brothers pledge to try to persuade father

62 Joseph instructs his servants to conceal brothers' bartered goods in their saddlebags, so that they might discover them when they get back to their family and perhaps return

63-68 Brothers try to persuade father to send brother with them; father is hesitant; brothers open saddlebags and discover returned goods; they exclaim that they will use them to barter for another caravan's worth of corn besides taking care of their brother; father says he will only send their brother along if they pledge to bring him back, unless they should be surrounded (and cannot do so); they pledge; **Jacob instructs them to enter the city by different gates as a precaution, and they do so**

69 Brothers enter into Joseph's presence; Joseph accommodates his brother and reveals his identity to him and tells him not grieve at what the other brothers have been doing

70-75 Joseph furnishes brothers with provisions and puts king's drinking cup in brother's saddlebag; man cries out to caravan that the brothers are thieves, as the king's drinking cup is missing; brothers deny stealing it; men ask themselves what shall be the punishment if the brothers are proven liars, and they answer that the one in whose saddlebag is found the drinking cup shall be detained

76-79 Joseph searches brothers' baggage and pulls the drinking cup from newly-arrived brother's saddlebag; brothers say that if he stole then there was a brother of his who stole before him; Joseph maintains his secrets; brothers say that their father is old, and they ask for Joseph to detain one of them in this brother's place; Joseph replies that he will not detain anyone but him in whose saddlebag the property was found

80-82 Oldest brother reminds others of their pledge and of their previous duty to watch over Joseph; oldest brother says he will stay in Egypt until father permits him to return or until God decides for him; he instructs others to tell their father that his other son stole, that they could not guard against the unseen, and that the father should ask those at the town (where the theft was announced) and those in the caravan whether or not they are telling the truth

83-87 Father disbelieves them and asserts that patience is most fitting for him; his eyes turn white from suppressed sorrow; brothers remark that he will never forget Joseph; he says that he knows from God what they know not; **father tells them to go enquire about Joseph and his brother**, and not to despair of God's mercy

88-92 Brothers enter into Joseph's presence with scanty merchandise; they complain of misfortune and request charity; he asks them if they realize what they did to Joseph and to his brother when they were ignorant; they ask in amazement if he is indeed Joseph, and he acknowledges it; he says that God does not fail to reward those who do good works and fear Him and are patient; they acknowledge that God has preferred him over them, and **they admit their sin; Joseph tells them that no reproach is upon them that**

day; he wishes God's forgiveness for them and affirms that God is most merciful

93 Joseph instructs the brothers to go back and place his shirt over his father's face, so he will regain sight, and then to return to him with their whole family

94-98 When caravan departs Egypt, father detects Joseph's scent from afar, though people consider him senile; when caravan arrives the shirt is placed over his face, and he regains sight; he reminds the brothers of his saying that he knew from God what they knew not; **brothers admit to being at fault and implore father to ask God for their forgiveness; father replies that he will do so**

a' (99-101)

Part a' concludes the Joseph story. In this last part of the story, Joseph accommodates his family and welcomes them to Egypt. He raises his parents to the level of the throne and then sees them, along with his brothers, prostrating themselves before him. This, he informs his father, is the fulfillment of his dream, which God has made come true. He goes on to observe how God has been good to him: He has removed him from prison and has brought his family from the desert after Satan had sown enmity between him and his brothers. The story concludes with Joseph praying to God, noting what God has taught him of the interpretation of dreams, praising Him as Creator and Protector, and asking God to take him up finally as a Muslim, as one submitting to God, and to join him with the righteous.

A'/Epilogue (102-111)

The last section, or Epilogue, puts the Joseph story in context. This story, it affirms, is one of the stories that God reveals to His Messenger, like the ones He has revealed to those messengers who came before. Nevertheless, as the Epilogue states, most people do not believe. In the center are rhetorical questions about ignoring the signs in heaven and on earth and about God's eventual punishment of those who ignore them, and an instruction to the Prophet to call people to the One God.

Here is a simplified diagram of the chapter's structure:

A Prologue

B Joseph Story

a Dream

b Brothers' trick; well; travel to Egypt

c Joseph established in house

d Attempts at seduction

e Prisoners' dreams; Joseph's sermon; king's dream

d' Admission of guilt; forgiveness

c' Joseph established in land

b' Joseph's tricks; drinking cup; travel to Egypt

a' Dream fulfilled

A' Epilogue

Looking back at this chapter, one notices the clear connections between beginning, middle, and end pertaining to the story and dream interpretation. In addition, one sees that the universal message stated by Joseph in his sermon—that there exists One God, the God of Joseph and his forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whereas those supposed deities worshiped by his companions are just names—occurs in the very center.

Moving on to Chapter 13, *Thunder*, we discover that it is also composed of three sections. Complementing Chapter 12, which, as we have observed, highlights an instance of God's intervention in human affairs, it highlights evidence of God's work in heaven and on earth. This chapter points to God's manifold signs in nature, while affirming that His signs are not produced on request for skeptics; the Prophet, it states, only brings forth what God has permitted. In addition, we find in the center references to the rewards and punishments awaiting people in the Hereafter. Let us proceed now to discuss each section individually.

A (1-17)

Chapter 13 begins with letters, as does Chapter 12 (here they are ALMR, whereas in Chapter 12 they are ALR). God sends His signs to people, whether stories in plain Arabic (12:2-3) or signs in nature (13:2-4), so that people might understand and become wise. The section goes on to quote the disbelievers, who mock the idea of a second creation—the Resurrection—and ask why God does not send a sign down to the Prophet. God knows what is concealed, the text affirms, and if people change what is in their souls, He might change their state.

However, when He wills a people's punishment, there can be no averting it.

In the middle of this section (v. 13), we find a reference to thunder, from which Chapter 13 takes its name. Thunder is a particularly clear sign in nature. It is a proclamation of God's praise, as the Qur'an points out. In addition, it is associated with lightning, which inspires both hope and fear (v. 12). Together, they portend benefit for people, in the falling of rain, as well as sudden destruction.

Furthermore, as in the previous pair we discussed, [Chapters 2](#) and [3](#), we notice a structural tie here between the last section of the first chapter and the first section of the second. Specifically, the rhetorical statement about the disbelievers from Joseph's Epilogue (*How many a sign in heaven and earth do they pass by, taking no notice!*) anticipates the elaboration of His signs apparent in nature in verses 2-4; likewise the rhetorical question from the Epilogue (*Do they feel secure that God's overwhelming punishment will not descend upon them?*) anticipates the reference to lightning bolts in the first section of *Thunder*.⁸ Thus, in this pair again, while the second chapter's first section corresponds to the first section of the preceding chapter, as we have indicated above, it is also tied firmly to the last section of that chapter.

B (18-29)

The middle section is composed of three parts. The first and third point to the wretched abode awaiting disbelievers—what they would pay all there is in heaven and on earth, were that in their possession, to ransom themselves from. The central part, by contrast, evokes the entrance of the righteous into Gardens of Bliss. They shall enter along with the righteous of their ancestors, spouses, and descendants, where they shall be saluted by angels, saying to them, *Peace be upon you, for what you bore with steadfastness. How excellent is your final home!*

In this section, we find a correspondence to the middle part of the Joseph story. Here, the mention of the virtuous among forefathers (v. 23) recalls the reference made by Joseph to the religion of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob from within the prison (12:38; cf. also 12:6 and 12:100-101 from the beginning and the end of the story). In addition, here the glorious heavenly reward is outlined for those who remain patient, calling to mind the steadfastness of Joseph during his time of incarceration.

A' (30-43)

Like the Epilogue of *Joseph*, section A' of *Thunder* puts the message of this chapter into context: The Prophet is the last in a succession of God's messengers, sent to alert people and to enlighten them. Also, in the center of this section, as in the center of Chapter 12's Epilogue, we encounter instructions to the Prophet to call people unto God and none other. And toward the close of this chapter, we likewise are given to understand that the Prophet, like those prophets sent before him, might witness some of what lies in store for the disbelieving peoples.

Meanwhile, in the last part of this section as well, the Qur'an is identified as a decree revealed in Arabic (v. 37). This verse, by its distinction of the text's language, recalls the beginning of Chapter 12, where the Arabic nature of the Scripture is affirmed (12:2: *We have revealed it as an Arabic Qur'an, so that you may learn wisdom*). Again, as with the long pair we discussed above, the structural tie here between the end of the second chapter and the beginning of the first further binds the two chapters together.

Here is a simplified diagram of Chapter 13's structure:

A Signs exist that God is One and Almighty; these are apparent so that people may be certain that they will meet their Lord; people ask doubtfully for a sign from the Prophet and worship others besides Him

B Heavenly rewards await those who respond to God's call and do good works; stern punishment lies in store for those who ignore it and spread corruption in the land

A' Prophets before were ignored and mocked; people ascribe partners to God; God has promised believers the Garden and disbelievers the Fire. Regarding this chapter, we may remark finally on the connection between the first section, the middle, and the last, in the reference to people's ultimate meeting with their Lord and their accommodation in a final abode. Moreover, we find once more emphasized in the center a universal message, namely, that those who respond to God's call and live righteously shall eventually enjoy splendid rewards, while those who deny God shall, at the end, lie on a bed of misery.

Lastly, considering these two chapters together, we notice that thematically they are linked not only by evidence of God—be it His intervention in human affairs or His signs in nature—but also by the call to monotheism (cf. 12:108, as

well as Joseph's statement from the center of the story, and 13:36) and by the observation that most people disbelieve (cf. 12:106, as well as Joseph's remark from the center of the story, and 13:1). The latter general statement about the predominance of disbelievers evidently reflects the religious environment of the late Meccan period. One does not find verses to the effect that most people disbelieve, for example, in [Chapters 2](#) and [3](#), which were revealed among the nascent Muslim community in Medina.⁹

Before concluding our discussion of the pairing of Chapters 12 and 13, at this point focusing especially on theme, it is worthwhile to consider further the context of revelation. These two chapters were revealed during the late Meccan period, as we have indicated, specifically between the Year of Grief (619)—when the Prophet lost his uncle and protector Abu Talib and his beloved wife Khadija—and the Emigration to Medina (0/622). This was a time of sadness, and one of heightened danger. The Meccans were growing increasingly incensed by the new religion that denounced their polytheism and worldliness and were turning ever more to repression and violence, a dark trend that culminated in the conspiracy led by Abu Jahl to kill the Prophet in his bed.¹⁰ As Sayyid Qutb has observed, Chapter 12 may well have suggested the Emigration to the Prophet. Like Joseph, Muhammad might indeed become established abroad and proclaim his message there (it is said that *Joseph* was recited to the first converts from Medina; from their perspective, this chapter may well have contributed to their understanding of the Prophet, who brought the same message as Joseph, and suggested such benefits as could come from his administration of affairs).¹¹ Abroad, in Medina, Islam might take root and thrive.

Regarding the probable lingering feelings of sadness and loss at this time, both with the Prophet and among his followers, we see furthermore that together these two chapters provide a message of hope. In particular, both chapters highlight the occurrence of family reunions. Examining Chapter 12 more closely, we notice that whereas the brothers' trick of casting Joseph in the well aims at separating him from the family, Joseph's three corresponding tricks—sending back the bartered goods so the brothers will return to Egypt with their other brother, concealing the king's cup in that brother's saddlebag so he can be detained in Egypt, and sending his shirt with his brothers so they will return with their father and mother—all aim at bringing the family back together again. Chapter 12 emphasizes that joyful family reunions may occur in this life, even if at a distant place. Moreover, Joseph's closing prayer at the end of B' anticipates

the center of *Thunder*. In 12:101, Joseph prays that God will join him in the Hereafter with the righteous. And in 13:23, the Qur'an affirms that those who obey God—as well as the righteous among their parents, spouses, and offspring—will enter finally Gardens of Bliss. From these two chapters, the faithful can take solace. Happy reunions may indeed take place in this life (even if the rifts dividing members were caused by enmity, for hearts might be changed and forgiveness may win the day, as the first chapter demonstrates), and they certainly will happen among believers in the next. We observe as well that this hopeful message, though general in appeal to be sure, doubtless had particular resonance for the Prophet and the early Muslims around him, for whom the Emigration to Medina would mean, in many cases, leaving relatives behind in Mecca.

In such ways, then, Chapters 12 and 13 cohere thematically. And, as we have shown above, structurally they consist both of three concentrically arranged sections that, besides contributing to the particular ring of the chapter, also relate to their counterparts in the adjacent chapter. In addition, they are bound together by structural ties, both at their intersection by the reference to God's signs in nature, and at their ends by the specification of the Qur'an's language. In sum, Chapters 12 and 13 are another example of a highly cohesive pair.

Five Chapter Groups

In this chapter we discuss the third major principle evident in the organization of the Qur'an: the arrangement of pairs and certain individual chapters in coherent groups. These groups include as few as three and as many as ten consecutive chapters—the average number is six—and as wholes they exhibit the same symmetrical patterns of concentrism and parallelism (again, more often the former) that we have observed in individual chapters and in pairs. There are nineteen groups altogether, and most of these have been recognized previously by various commentators and scholars. Below we will outline three groups, composed respectively of long, medium, and short chapters, and then comment on the overall arrangement of groups in the Qur'an.

At the outset, we point out that the relationships we highlight in the groups are by no means exhaustive. We merely call attention to some of the prominent links that serve to mark each set of chapters as a discrete group. It is to be expected that more such links might be found within each group; their effect would be to further bind the chapters as a unit.

Let us look, then, at a Medinan group ([Chapters 2-5](#)), a mostly late Meccan group ([Chapters 10-15](#)), and a mostly early Meccan group ([Chapters 109-112](#)). As indicated above, these are examples of groups containing long, medium, and short chapters. We shall also discuss more extensively a middle Meccan group, composed of medium-length chapters, in our next chapter. (For outlines of all other chapter groups in the Qur'an, the reader may consult [Appendix C](#).)

Chapters 2-5

This group was recognized in the classical era by such scholars as al-Zarkashi and al-Suyuti, and more recently by Dmitry Frolov.¹ It consists of two pairs: [Chapters 2-3](#) and [4-5](#). As a group, these chapters provide legislation for the new Muslim community established at Medina and address the People of the Book. In addition, they cohere—besides as pairs—by means of concentrism. Thus, the inner chapters are related by the theme of kin (their titles being *The Family of*

'Imran and Women), while the outer chapters concern the subject of pilgrimage. Also, the outer chapters feature nearly identical statements emphasizing pluralism (2:62 and 5:69).

Chapters 10-15

These six chapters, mostly late Meccan except for Chapter 15, which dates from the middle Meccan period of revelation, have been recognized as a group by Yusuf 'Ali.² They are linked by the initial letters ALR.

At this point, before going on to highlight other correspondences in this group, we might pause briefly in order to elaborate on the occurrence of initial letters in numerous chapters of the Qur'an. In total, 29 chapters begin with such letters, all but two ([Chapters 2 and 3](#)) dating from the Meccan period. Looking at the earliest attestation, N in Chapter 68 from the first Meccan phase, one sees that the letter belongs to a sequence of oaths (*N, by the pen, and by what they inscribe—*); see also Chapter 44 from the same early phase (vv. 1-2: *HM, By the Scripture that makes manifest—*). One may compare the openings of these two chapters with those of other early Meccan chapters, Chapter 92 for instance (vv. 1-3: *By the night descending, By the day appearing in splendor, And by That which created the male and the female—*). Evidently, the initial letters in their earliest attestations are part of sequences of oaths, and one might read them as signifying oaths in later chapters too, even though the context does not require this. Also, one notes that the initial letters are nearly always followed by a statement concerning revelation. Of additional interest here is that the initial letters, as attested in the Qur'an, represent the range of consonantal forms of the Arabic alphabet.³ It seems clear that together these letters call attention to the fact that the Qur'an is a Scripture revealed in Arabic. Collectively, then, this seems to be their primary function. They may have another important function as well: to contribute in places toward linking a number of chapters. Hence we find, for example, the group of Chapters 40-46 joined by the initial letters HM, and Chapters 10-15, our immediate focus, joined by the initial letters ALR.⁴

Looking again at this particular group, which, thematically, highlights a number of stories of earlier prophets, we find that it has a concentric arrangement, consisting of an opening pair, a middle pair, and a closing pair: 10-11, 12-13, and 14-15. The first pair is linked to the last in that seven particular prophets are mentioned in Chapter 11 (Noah, Hud, Salih, Abraham, Lot, Shu'ayb, and Moses) and the same seven are mentioned or referred to again in

Chapters 14-15. In this group, the middle pair stands out, featuring a long story of a single prophet, Joseph, in Chapter 12 and an additional initial letter (M in ALMR) in Chapter 13.

Chapters 109-112

These four chapters, early Meccan except for Chapter 110, which is Medinan, include the pairs 109-110 and 111-112. They have been recognized previously as a group by Michel Cuypers.⁵ As a group, they cohere by concentrism. Thus, we find the outer two chapters to be linked by the opening imperative, *Say, . . .*, and the inner two by the idea of victory over polytheism (the first of these concerning the conquest of Mecca, the second dealing with the perdition of the archpolytheist Abu Lahab).

What has not been recognized previously, however, and what we shall now discuss in the remainder of this chapter, is the manner in which the groups collectively are ordered. Indeed, upon examination, we find that these nineteen groups constitute two concentric wholes, or “systems,” each composed of nine groups, in addition to one independent group in the middle (cf. the structure of *The Opening*, explained in our first chapter, consisting of two concentric outer parts and a central verse). We will proceed here to discuss these systems one at a time. Again, we mention that the correspondences referred to below are not exhaustive; we merely highlight prominent ones that serve to hold each arrangement of groups together. Also, we note here the structural importance of chapter names.⁶ Apparently, the chapter names may correspond to each other within groups (as in the example of *The Family of ‘Imran* and *Women*, discussed above) and within systems (as noted below), thereby contributing to the cohesion of the Qur’an.

System A (Chapters 2-49)

In this system, we find the following disposition of chapter groups:

a(2-5)
 b(6-9)
 c(10-15)
 d(16-21)
 e(22-24)
 d'(25-32)
 c'(33-39)
 b'(40-46)
 a'(47-49)

We discern this arrangement by observing the correspondences between groups. Between each group and its counterpart, there are at least two notable connections. These are as follows:

a (2-5) 3:103: Unity: holding fast together 2:148: Pluralism: every community has its prayer direction; call to compete in doing good works 2:196: Call (after Emigration to Medina, 0/624) to perform pilgrimage 3:96: Bekka (old name for Mecca; only attestation in Qur'an)	a' (47-49) 49:10: Unity: brotherhood of believers 49:13: Pluralism: humankind created as peoples and tribes so that groups may come to know one another 48: Victory (Treaty of Hudaybiyya, 6/628): Muslims may perform pilgrimage without harassment 48:24: Mecca (only attestation in Qur'an)
b (6-9) 6:92: God sent the Qur'an to warn Mother of Cities (Mecca) and all around it 9: Repentance 102-18: God accepts repentance	b' (40-46) 42:7: God sent the Qur'an to warn Mother of Cities (Mecca) and all around it 40: The Forgiver 3; 42:25: God forgives sin and accepts repentance

<p>c (10-15)</p> <p>10:10: The last prayer (said on Judgment Day): “<i>Praise be to God, Lord of all peoples</i>”</p> <p>10: Jonah</p> <p>98: People of Jonah spared ruin</p>	<p>c’(33-39)</p> <p>39:75: It will be said on Judgment Day: “<i>Praise be to God, Lord of all peoples</i>”</p> <p>37:139-48: Jonah shown mercy because he was among those who glorified God⁷</p>
<p>d (16-21)</p> <p>16: The Bee</p> <p>18:83-98: The Two-Horned (Legend of Alexander)</p> <p>21: The Prophets</p> <p>5: Disbelievers call the Prophet a poet; 107-08: God sent Prophet as a mercy to all peoples; monotheism was revealed to him</p>	<p>d’(25-32)</p> <p>27: The Ant⁸</p> <p>29: The Spider</p> <p>30: The Greeks</p> <p>2-5: Byzantines defeated, but soon will be victorious⁹</p> <p>26: The Poets; 221-27: Poets lie and lead people astray, except poets who believe, do good works, remember God often, and defend themselves after being wronged</p>

As we have observed previously in various chapters, so we find in this system a connection between the beginning, the middle, and the end, as well as an emphasis on a universal message in the center. The connection involves making a spiritual journey to the religion’s core. The pilgrimage to Mecca, a key theme in the first and last group, figures prominently in Chapters 22-24 (these, by the way, have the titles *The Pilgrimage*, *The Believers*, and *Light*). Just as praying in the direction of Mecca unifies the believers, so does making the pilgrimage to Mecca bring them together. The middle of this system promotes unity among Muslims and highlights a common center.

But like Chapter 2, which states that other religious communities have their own prayer directions, and that *Wherever you turn, there is the Face of God*(2:148; 2:115), Chapter 22 affirms that God has appointed rites for every religious community (v. 34). Moreover, for Muslims, clearly it is not the sacrificial rite itself of slaughtering a ram that matters to God—by which they commemorate Abraham’s willingness to offer his own son—but their piety in carrying it out (v. 37). Above and beyond unity, therefore, the middle of this

system stresses belief in God, obedience to Him. And true belief in God, such as that held by pious Muslims, transcends communal boundaries: Included among those who will attain salvation for their faith, evidently, are Jews, Christians, Sabians, and Magians (22:17).¹⁰

In Chapter 24 as well, one finds a striking affirmation of religious pluralism. The celebrated Light Verse (35) states that God's light is of neither east nor west. It shines, as we read in the next verse, in houses of worship, ones He has permitted to be raised and wherein His name is mentioned. By comparing 22:40, which refers to monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques wherein God's name is mentioned often, with this verse directly following the Light Verse, it seems evident that a non-restrictive meaning for houses is intended in *Light* (the two verses, 22:40-41, in fact, compare closely to 24:36-37). Furthermore, the term itself, "houses," has a general connotation, unlike the specific terms mentioned in *The Pilgrimage*. God's light, therefore, shines in houses of worship of various denominations. In the Qur'an, as we see once more, pluralism is structurally emphasized.

System A' (Chapters 57-112)

The second system has this arrangement of chapter groups:

a(57-66)
b(67-72)
c(73-80)
d(81-88)
e(89-92)
d'(93-98)
c'(99-104)
b'(105-108)
a'(109-112)

Here again we point to at least two correspondences between each group and its counterpart:

<p>a (57-66)</p> <p>57:10: Conquest of Mecca 57:1; 59:1; 61:1; 62:1; 64:1: Statements about glorifying God</p>	<p>a' (109-112)</p> <p>110:1: Conquest of Mecca 110:3: Command to glorify God</p>
<p>b (67-72)</p> <p>67:27: Disbelievers seeing their punishment 67:30: Question: when disbelievers' source dries, who will supply them water? 71:15: Question: have you not seen how God has created the seven heavens, one above the other?</p>	<p>b' (105-108)</p> <p>107:1: Question: have you seen those who disbelieve? 107:7: Disbelievers hold back small kindnesses, such as water 105:1: Question: have you not seen how God dealt with the army of the elephant (He sent birds from above, striking them with fired clay)?</p>
<p>c (73-80)</p> <p>76: Span of Time 79:1-5: Rider oath: horses on a raid</p>	<p>c' (99-104)</p> <p>103: The Time 100:1-5: Rider oath: horses on a raid</p>
<p>d (81-88)</p> <p>87:1 Name of Lord invoked 87:6 Assurance to Prophet: God will teach you to recite, so you do not forget 86:2: God created and proportioned His works</p>	<p>d' (93-98)</p> <p>96:1 Name of Lord invoked 96:1: Instruction to Prophet: <i>Recite!</i>; 3: repeated instruction to Prophet: <i>Recite!</i> 96:2: God created humankind from a clot</p>

Reviewing this system, we see once more a connection between the beginning, middle, and end, and a universal message stressed in the center. Accordingly, the outer two groups point to the conquest of Mecca (8/630), and Chapter 90 of the middle group opens with an oath on the authority of this city and an affirmation that the Prophet is an inhabitant of it (these middle chapters, by the way, have the titles *The Dawn*, *The City*, *The Sun*, and *The Night*).

Moreover, just as the first system stresses belief in God in the center, the second puts emphasis on performing good works in this place. For example, we read in *The City* (vv. 13-16) about the meaning of the steep path: It involves freeing a slave, or feeding an orphan or indigent during a time of hunger (in pointed contrast, we see, to the harshness and selfish behavior referred to in 89:17-20). Such as them—those who believe, who urge upon others perseverance and patience during times of difficulty, and who perform acts of mercy—they will be the ones rewarded in the Afterlife and granted a position on God's right (90:17-18).

In addition, from a broader perspective, we notice that the groups of the two systems A and A' likewise correspond with each other. Again, we find at least two connections between each group and its counterpart in the other system. These are as follows:

<p>Chapters 2-5</p> <p>2:255: Throne Verse (monotheism)</p> <p>3:13, 123: Victory over polytheists at Badr</p> <p>5:2 Recollection of time when disbelievers barred entry to Sacred Mosque</p>	<p>Chapters 109-112</p> <p>112: Oneness (monotheism)</p> <p>111:1-3: Damnation of polytheist leader Abu Lahab (died immediately after Badr)</p> <p>110:2: Crowds entering God's religion (at/around time of Farewell Pilgrimage, 10/632)</p>
<p>6-9</p> <p>6: Livestock</p> <p>136-45: Sacrifice of livestock</p> <p>9:17-18: Believers are new custodians of Ka'ba</p> <p>9:25-26: God protected Mecca at Battle of Hunayn (8/630)</p>	<p>105-108</p> <p>108: Abundance</p> <p>108:2: Injunction: pray and sacrifice in God's name</p> <p>106:3-4: Quraysh (former custodians Ka'ba) called to worship the Lord</p> <p>105: God protected Mecca at Battle of Elephant (ca. 570)¹¹</p>
<p>10-15</p> <p>13: Thunder</p> <p>31: Disbelievers will be struck by a tremendous blow (qaria)</p> <p>15: Al-Hijr (mountainous abode of Thamud)</p> <p>80-84: disbelieving Thamud thought themselves secure in their refuge, but they were taken by a mighty blast</p>	<p>99-104</p> <p>101: The Day of Noise and Concussion</p> <p>1-5: description of the qaria</p> <p>5: mountains will be like carded wool</p>

<p>16-21</p> <p>16:2, 102: God sends down revelation by means of the Spirit (Gabriel)</p> <p>17:85: People ask the Prophet about the Spirit (Gabriel)</p> <p>20:25-26: Moses prays for God to open his breast and make his task easy</p>	<p>93-98</p> <p>97:4: On the Night of Power, God sent down the Spirit (Gabriel)</p> <p>94:1, 5-6: God reassures Prophet: He has opened his breast; with every hardship there is ease</p>
<p>22-24</p> <p>22: The Pilgrimage</p> <p>24: Light</p>	<p>89-92</p> <p>89:2: Oath: first ten nights of the pilgrimage month</p> <p>90: The City (Mecca)</p> <p>89: The Dawn</p> <p>91: The Sun</p>
<p>25-32</p> <p>25: The Differentiator</p> <p>1: God sent down the Differentiator to His servant so that he may be a warner to all peoples</p> <p>32: The Prostration</p> <p>15: When the signs of God are mentioned to believers, they bow in worship</p>	<p>81-88</p> <p>86:13: Qur'an separates truth from falsehood</p> <p>81:27: Qur'an is a reminder to all peoples</p> <p>84:21: When the Qur'an is recited to disbelievers, they do not bow in worship</p>
<p>33-39</p> <p>37: The Ones in Ranks</p> <p>1: Oath: the ones in ranks;</p> <p>165: angels stand in ranks</p> <p>37:21: Day of Sorting that disbelievers used to deny</p> <p>38:67: Message of Qur'an a Mighty Tiding</p>	<p>73-80</p> <p>78:38: On Judgment Day, the Spirit (Gabriel) and the angels will be arranged in ranks</p> <p>77:13-15: Day of Sorting: woe to disbelievers at that time</p> <p>78: The Mighty Tiding</p> <p>1-2: People ask about the Mighty Tiding</p>

<p>40-46</p> <p>40:18, 41:34: <i>hamim</i> (intimate friend) 46:29-34: Jinn testify to Qur'an's validity</p>	<p>67-72</p> <p>69:35, 70:10: <i>hamim</i> (intimate friend) 72:1-15: Jinn testify to Qur'an's validity</p>
<p>47-49</p> <p>47:2, 48:29: Muhammad 47:4: Call to fight disbelievers 48:18: Treaty of Hudaybiyya (6/628)</p>	<p>57-66</p> <p>61:6: Ahmad (another name for Muhammad) 57: Iron 25: God has sent down iron, with its strength 66:9 Call to fight disbelievers 60: Women Tested (distrust of Meccans after breaking of Treaty of Hudaybiyya, 8/630)</p>

From the above, we see that not only in each system do groups correspond internally according to concentricity (each system comprising a ring), but also that the two systems mirror each other. Again, symmetry is the rule; it obtains in chapters and pairs, just as it obtains in groups, systems, and the Book as a whole. Considering the total pattern of these relationships, we may speak of a dense interconnection within a single, comprehensive design. The Qur'an's structure, it becomes apparent, is at once characterized by great complexity and pure simplicity.

Putting the chapter groups together, according to their correspondences between systems, we observe this whole arrangement for the Qur'an:

- [1]
- 2-5
- 6-9
- 10-15
- 16-21
- 22-24
- 25-32
- 33-39
- 40-46
- 47-49
- [50-56]
- 57-66
- 67-72
- 73-80
- 81-88
- 89-92
- 93-98
- 99-104
- 105-108
- 109-112
- [113-14]¹²

Finally, let us note that the structure of the Qur'an contains five major points of reference: the introductory Chapter 1, Chapters 22-24 (the fifth group of System A), the middle Chapters 50-56, Chapters 89-92 (the fifth group of System A'), and the concluding Chapters 113-14. The first two and last two points of reference of which we can speak of so far are as we find, all oriented to God: the first being a prayer of praise and supplication, the last being two prayers of

refuge, and the second and second-to-last highlighting Mecca, the place of divine self-manifestation on earth.

Overall, the large concentric order has the effect of embedding Chapters 50-56, the tenth group in the Qur'an. Let us now turn our attention to this group.

Six: The Central Group

We now look at seven medium-length chapters in the middle of the Qur'an: Chapters 50-56. They date from around the time of the middle Meccan period, after a quantity of short chapters had already been revealed and when the Prophet had begun public preaching (to the disbelief and derision of most of his auditors; they dismissed him as mad). The chapters have been recognized previously by Yusuf 'Ali as a group pointing to the Hereafter and directed to aspects eschatological.¹ Indeed, as we notice, the group as a whole treats a universal theme. The group concerns what comes after death: Resurrection, Judgment, and the Garden and the Fire.

Before discussing these chapters, let us return for a moment to 15:87, in which God speaks to the Prophet: *We have brought you seven of the mathani [doubled ones] and the Glorious Qur'an* (the *mathani* may also be translated as the "repetitions" or "repeated ones"). As we mentioned in our [chapter one](#), this verse has been taken as a reference to *The Opening*, which—when counting the invocation—totals seven verses, and is repeated by the observant Muslim at least seventeen times in a day. However, we pointed out that counting the invocation is inconsistent with practice elsewhere in the Qur'an, and we argued moreover that *The Opening* is structurally and thematically complete without it; we indicated likewise that *The Opening* corresponds to the second Prayer of Refuge and last chapter of the Qur'an (*People*), also six verses. Here, we propose that *seven of the mathani* of 15:87 in fact refers to the seven central chapters, 50-56.

We find evidence for this interpretation in the lengths of chapters from the early and middle Meccan periods. To begin with, we note that an important transition apparently took place in the ongoing process of revelation. At some point, it seems clear that the body of chapters previously revealed came to be identified as constituting a Book. Angelika Neuwirth, who has discussed this new identification of the Scripture, finds that Chapter 15 specifically marks the stage of canonization. Turning next to Nöldeke's periodization of Qur'anic chapters, which has gained acceptance among many scholars, we see that some

fifty-seven chapters had been revealed when Chapter 15 was sent down, including the group of seven concerning us here. Thirdly, as concerns evidence for our proposed interpretation, we discover that the average of these seven chapters is 64 verses, approximately double the length of the fifty other chapters, whose average is 33. (For her part, Neuwirth considers only twenty-five chapters to have been revealed—besides the group of seven—when Chapter 15 was sent down. Yet interestingly, the average of these twenty-five comes to 34 verses—again, about half of 64, the average length of our group of seven.) The “seven doubled ones” of 15:87 can thus logically be construed to refer to seven units of doubled length at the time when Chapter 15 came down, i.e., to Chapters 50-56.²

It may be noted, too, concerning chapter lengths, that the final average of all 114 chapters turned out, at the end of revelation, to be 55 verses, and therefore Chapters 50-56, which are followed by generally shorter chapters, do not occur in the actual middle of the text, but rather toward the end. In fact, once a reader or listener finishes Chapter 56, less than twenty percent of the Qur'an's verses remain, and these are mostly shorter verses at that. We may relate this aspect of the Qur'an's structure to what Mustansir Mir has called “acceleration,” whereby successive chapters within a group reach their high points earlier than previous ones (this has the effect of “accelerating the overall movement of the *surahs* toward the finale”).³ After the reader or listener completes the central group of the Qur'an, he or she is apt to sense that time is short. Thereafter, the Qur'an increasingly rapidly reaches its conclusion.

Let us begin by looking at the first four chapters of this group, namely, 50-53. These consist of the two pairs 50-51 and 52-53 (see [Appendix A](#) for structural summaries of these chapters; a discussion of their pairing may be found in [Appendix B](#)). The Qur'an makes numerous references in these chapters to earlier prophets, and one of the prominent references is to Noah. He is the first former prophet mentioned in the opening section of Chapter 50 and the last in the middle section of Chapter 51 (50:12, 51:46), and he recurs near the end of Chapter 53 (53:52; Noah also figures in Chapter 54, as we shall see below). Noah came telling his people to worship God only and warned of catastrophe for them. However, they would not heed his message and labeled him as mad (see, for example, 54:9). The parallels to the Prophet's situation in Mecca are obvious. Thus former prophets are invoked to alert listeners.

Furthermore, admonitory stories such as Noah's, in this group and elsewhere, are told in a way that renders them particularly arresting and vivid.

Islam Dayeh explains:

A characteristic of the Qur'anic presentation of biblical and eschatological narratives is the manner in which these narratives are retold: they appear merged with the account of Meccan persecution. Moreover, the rapid switch of verb tenses (*al-iltifat*) is a narrative technique which implies that biblical history, conveyed through these narratives, was not a distant and vague memory; rather, it was intimately present and re-enacted *there* in Mecca.

The lively and compelling nature of presentation, of course, was meant to awaken the listeners to the stories' message. As Dayeh goes on to say, "these narratives sought to remind them of past nations which had brought disaster and calamity upon themselves after having refused to accept the call of their messengers."⁴ The Prophet warns his audience, but he also brings good news. Accordingly, these four chapters, and the central group as a whole, feature double portraits of the Garden and the Fire, Heaven and Hell. Though these portraits involve the use of simile, an object or image from this world giving an idea of something belonging to the next, while real knowledge remains hidden,⁵ the portraits nevertheless are highly striking. Thus, for example, we are to envision trees of acacia and lotus, offering shade, bearing fragrance, and relieved of their thorns; fruit near at hand, such as pomegranates and dates; fine carpets and cushions lined with brocade; male youths for servants and maidens for companions; abundant, flowing water (regarding this last detail, Nerina Rustomji writes: "Central to the understanding of the power of the image of the Garden is the fact that there is not a single river in all of Arabia"). On the other hand, in Hell people literally roast (note 54:48: *Feel Hellfire's touch!*) and are scalded; they are dragged on their faces, and they must consume revolting food of the Zaqqum tree and imbibe boiling water. Rustomji remarks of the two destinations that the effects of the Fire are exactly the reverse of those of the Garden. Hence, while dwellers of Paradise enjoy cool shade, fruit, refreshing drink, and companionship, those of Hell suffer extreme heat, noisome food, stomach-burning drink, and solitude.⁶ In this connection, we are to reflect above all on the greatest contrast between the Garden and the Fire, what confers highest honor on the one hand and stigmatizes and fills with deepest regret on the other: proximity to God in Heaven versus total exclusion for the person in Hell.

We mentioned above that 50-51 and 52-53 constitute pairs. In addition, we

may refer to an overall chiastic pattern in these four chapters and to a notable recurrence in them. The beginning of 50, we find, compares to the end of 53: Both point to the surprised reaction of listeners at hearing the Prophet's message, their marveling at it and considering it far-fetched (50:2; 53:59). Furthermore, alike statements about the inevitability of Judgment/divine punishment occur toward the beginning of 51 and toward the beginning of 52 (51:6 and 52:7), in both cases after a succession of oaths. These outer-inner correspondences have the effect of binding the four chapters together as a composite unit within the group. Moreover, the occurrence in each of them of *dhikr* (warn/remind) in some form, in the concluding sections of Chapters 50 and 51 (50:45 and 51:55) and the middle sections of Chapter 52 and 53 (52:29 and 53:29), has the same binding effect.

These four chapters, it will be found, collectively deal with the reality of Resurrection and its approach. They close with a warning about Judgment's imminence (53:57) and the command to worship God. This ending connects with the beginning of the next chapter, which opens with a striking statement about the Hour's imminence. Hence they lead into the following chapter and introduce its main theme, as we shall come to appreciate upon our examination of Chapter 54. Structurally, however, these four chapters correspond most closely with the last chapter of the group, Chapter 56. We will therefore proceed to look at Chapter 56, commenting on its structure (see [Appendix A](#) for a more detailed summary) and pointing out the various connections to Chapters 50–53, before finally turning our attention to Chapters 54–55.

Chapter 56, the longest of the group, is composed of three sections (as is each chapter of the group): Verses 1–56, 57–87, and 88–96. The first section states that no one will be able to deny the Resurrection when it comes and that people will be sorted into three classes. It then details the fate of those belonging to each class, those on God's right (in Heaven); those in front, nearest to Him (also in Heaven, naturally); and those on His left (in Hell). The middle section consists of a small ring, including two outer parts addressed to scoffers and dealing with creation, Resurrection, and God as the Agent for both; and a central part featuring an oath about the message being a noble Qur'an, a revelation from God. The last section refers briefly again to the fate of each class of person, before closing with an affirmation about the truth of the message and a command to glorify God.

The correspondences between Chapters 50–53 and Chapter 56 are numerous. Among them:

51:6: Judgment will surely fall	56:1: When the Event falls
52:7: Your Lord's torment will surely fall	
50:17: The Recording Angels on the Right and the Left	56:27-40: People on the Right 56:41-56: People on the Left
51:25: Greetings of "Peace"	56:26: Greetings of "Peace"
53:14: Near the Lotus Tree of the Utmost Boundary	56:28: Among thornless lotus trees
53:1: Oath: star when it sets	56:75: Oath: setting of the stars ⁷
52:48: Command to praise the Lord	56:96: Command to praise the Lord's name ⁸

Again, as in the case of correspondences between groups surrounding the central group, Chapters 50-56 (noted in our previous chapter), these correspondences within the central group have the effect of embedding Chapters 54 and 55. Let us now turn to them.

Chapter 54, *The Moon*, as we have indicated above, thematically follows Chapters 50–53, which concern the approach of the Resurrection. One encounters in the first verse of Chapter 54 the extraordinary statement—in the past tense—that the Hour has drawn near and the moon has split in two (an example of the dynamic style of the Qur'an, in this instance “a grammatical shift for a rhetorical purpose”⁹). Judgment is now so close that it is literally happening in front of us. The aspect of immediacy, and the surprise onset of the Final Recompense, is further reinforced in the center of the chapter by the example of the people of Thamud, who were destroyed for their transgression suddenly, in a moment, by a single tremendous blast—they did not even have seconds to realize what was happening to them, unlike the other heedless peoples referred to here: those of Noah, ‘Ad, Lot, and Pharaoh.¹⁰ At the end of the chapter also, we find a reminder that God's commands are executed immediately, in the blink of an eye (54:50). In fact, the idea of sudden and terrifying Judgment links the beginning, middle, and end of this chapter.

There is a distinct, frightful nature to this chapter (note again 54:48: *Feel Hellfire's touch!*), even though the themes it treats of accountability and punishment of the wicked occur throughout the Qur'an. To quote the Egyptian commentator Sayyid Qutb:

These very themes have been set forth in this *sura* in a special way, which transforms it into something completely new. They are presented with tempestuous fury, in a manner that slays and tears apart, the *sura* arousing

dread, surrounding itself with terror, spelling ruin. . . .¹¹

Indeed, a point that should arouse our concern: No misdeed or pernicious thought will go unconsidered; *Every matter, small and large, is on record*, the Qur'an states (54:53).¹² Nevertheless the chapter, however stern and admonitory, does include at the end verses of reassurance that the pious will be rewarded with an opposite, most exalted fate.

Structurally, the chapter consists of three sections: an introductory section (A) pointing to the Hour's arrival; a central section (B) recounting the fates of previous disbelievers, itself a five-part ring with the example of Thamud in the middle; and a concluding section (A') reaffirming the Hour's appointed arrival and outlining the contrasting fates of the heedless and the God-fearing. We may summarize this structure as follows:

A (1–8)

1–8 Statement: the **Hour is near** and the moon has split in two; when the disbelievers see a sign, they turn away and deny it, though numerous warnings have come to them; instruction to Prophet: turn from them; on the Day when the Caller will summon them, they will come forth like locusts, hastening to the Caller, saying "this is a hard Day"

B (9–42)

9–17 The people of Noah rejected the truth and rejected God's servant; God released a flood on them

18–22 The people of 'Ad rejected the truth; God sent against them a furious wind

23–32 The **people of Thamud** rejected the warnings and contradicted Salih; **God sent against them a single tremendous blast**

33–40 The people of Lot rejected the warnings; God sent against them a stone-bearing wind

41–42 The people of Pharaoh rejected God's signs; God seized them through His might and power (He drowned them in the Red Sea)

A' (43–55)

43–55 The fate of disbelievers (at Mecca) is no different from that of previous

disbelievers; the **Hour is promised them**—it will be most severe; on the Day they will be dragged through Hell on their faces; God has created everything in measure; God's commands are executed immediately; God has destroyed the likes of such disbelievers in the past; the God-fearing will be in Gardens with rivers, in the presence of an Omnipotent Sovereign

Chapter 55, *The Merciful*, is also a particularly distinct and noteworthy chapter. One tradition affirms, “Everything has its bride [or most beautiful part], and the bride of the Qur'an is *Surat al-Rahman* [*al-Rahman* being Arabic for ‘The Merciful’].”¹³ Sayyid Qutb, for his part, introduces it this way:

This *sura* has an arrangement all its own. It is a general proclamation on the great square of existence: an announcement of God's dazzling bounty, the beauty of His artifice, the innovation of His creation, the abundance of His blessing, the fine management of all that exists, and the orientation of all His creatures to His Noble Face.¹⁴

Putting us in mind of the first and last chapters of the Qur'an, which begin and end respectively with references to the two groups of reasoning beings, humankind and jinn, it is the only chapter addressed to both.

Chapter 55 moreover stands out, in terms of theme, for its stress on duality: duality absorbed at once in a larger unity. Yusuf 'Ali comments on this idea in the chapter, observing that, “though things are created in pairs, there is an underlying Unity, through the Creator, in the favors which He bestows, and in the goal to which they are marching.”¹⁵ Every duality, every pair, leads to the One God. The refrain question itself, of which we will speak more below, stresses this point again and again by *rabbikuma* (“the Lord of you both”). Even the number of the chapter may be found to illustrate the same principle. The fives in Chapter 55 are doubled. At the same time, they form one number.¹⁶

Structurally, this chapter consists of two outer sections highlighting God's majesty and mercy as evident in this world (A) and in the next (A'). He creates and has determined the cosmos; trees and plants worship Him; separated waters do not transgress their boundary. And in the next life, He shall punish sinners. These examples attest to His absolute majesty. As for His absolute mercy, which this chapter emphasizes (the refrain question, for example, recalls His blessings), it involves His filling of earth and sea with benefit and His rewarding of

believers with Paradise. The middle, which is linked both to A and A'—indeed, to the opening and closing verses—highlights God's eternal Face, august and bountiful, and His ever-recurring bestowal of mercy.

We may also remark on the pronounced instance of parallelism in this chapter. Following the first two verses, the subsequent parts of section A about 1) the creation of humankind, the regulation of the sun and the moon, the establishment of the balance (which should not be upset), and the filling of earth with sustenance, and 2) the creation of jinn, the Lordship of the two risings and settings, the releasing of the two bodies of water (which do not intermix), and the filling of the sea with bounty, are parallel. Similarly, prior to the last verse, the three parts of section A' about 1) Fire; scalding water, 2) Gardens; springs, and 3) Gardens; springs, are parallel. Parallelism, we observe, closely ties sections A and A' together.

The structure of the chapter may be summarized as follows:

A (1-25) Here: evidence of God's majesty and mercy

1-2 God's name: **The Merciful; He taught the Qur'an** (a kindness or mercy¹⁷)
3–13 God created humankind and taught them clear speech; the sun and moon follow prescribed courses; the plants and trees bow down in adoration; He raised the sky and established the balance, so people may not exceed the balance; He set down the earth and filled it with sustenance
14–25 God created humankind from clay and jinn from *smokeless fire*; He is Lord of the two risings and settings (of the sun and moon); He released the two bodies of (salt and fresh) water; they do not cross the boundary; from them come *pearls*, large and small; in them sail ships, large as mountains

B (26–30) Eternity: evidence of God's majesty and mercy

26–30 All things on earth perish, while God's Face remains, full of majesty and **kind regard**; every creature in the heavens and on earth supplicates Him; every day He is engaged in some matter (**God the Merciful**)

A' (31–78) Hereafter: evidence of God's majesty and mercy

31–45 *Fire and smoke* will be released on sinners among people and jinn; on that Day, the sky will be split and turn rose-colored like red hide; sinners will wander between flames and scalding water
46–61 There will be two (near) Gardens for those who fear God; there will be two flowing springs, and fruits of all sorts, and couches, and untouched

maidens like rubies and *pearls*; summary question: Is the reward for good anything but good?

- 62–77 There will be two other Gardens (for those on the Right); there will be two abundant springs, and various fruits, and beautiful, untouched maidens, and cushions and fine carpets
- 78 Statement: blessed be **the name of your Lord**, Who is full of majesty and **kind regard**

Chapters 54-55 constitute a pair, as Mustansir Mir has noted.¹⁸ Together they highlight the two fundamental aspects of God: awesomeness and mercy. Chapter 54 stresses the immediacy and sternness of God's retribution upon the heedless, and Chapter 55 stresses the abundance God has provided on earth and the reward in Paradise for believers. Furthermore, both chapters are highly striking to the ear by the recurrence of a rhetorical question. The refrain of Chapter 54 asks if anyone will take heed, while that of 55 addresses humans and jinn, asking them which of their Lord's blessings they deny. The refrains occur in some form throughout each chapter.¹⁹ In addition, looking at the middle sections of both, we find that 54 in the center provides examples of God punishing for disregard, while 55 at the core indicates that God is ever answering prayer.

The chapters, we notice too, are bound at the ends and in the middle. Thus, section A of 54 features a statement about the moon being split in two, just as section A' of 55 indicates that at the end of time the sky will be rent (verse 37, the middle of this last section's first part). 55:37 also says that the sky then will turn crimson. Though the detail of the moon's coloration at splitting is not mentioned in the Qur'an, in the Hebrew Bible and in the New Testament, a sign of the apocalypse is the moon's splitting and turning bloody.²⁰ Perhaps when reading about the moon's coming apart in 54:1, in accordance with the description of what happens to the sky in 55:37, we are meant—besides noticing the separation—to see red.

The chapters are also securely tied at their intersection. In the middle of 54:A', we read that God has created all things in measure (54:49). Then, in 55:A, in the two parts referring to God's creation, we read about prescribed courses, establishing the balance, and not crossing the boundary (55:5, 7, 20). This correspondence about the harmony and proportion of creation constitutes one tie. And, at the very middle of the pair, we find another tie, one particularly striking. The last verse of 54 (54:55) refers to an Omnipotent Sovereign. The Arabic noun

used here is *maliik*, an intensive form of “King” occurring only once in the Qur'an. The use of the indefinite form stands out as well given the referent, Almighty God. The chapter ends with an indefinite expression, creating a moment of suspense that draws us forward. Similarly, at 55:1 we encounter an extraordinary verse, the only one consisting solely of one of God's names. One may recall at this point the commentary of al-Alusi (d. 1270/1854) about the connection between 54:55 and 55:1: “It is as if someone should ask: ‘Who is the One described thus: ‘Omnipotent Sovereign?’ And it is uttered: ‘The Merciful.’”²¹ Here, then, in the linkage of 54:55 and 55:1 we find the joining of the two fundamental characteristics of God, which will be manifest to all on Judgment Day: awesomeness and mercy.

Stepping back from the level of the pair, we see that its middle also represents the core of the central group, as does the whole Qur'an. On the level of the group, one finds that Chapter 50 opens with an oath made on the authority of the Qur'an, while Chapter 56 contains in the middle an oath regarding the Qur'an; and the beginning of Chapter 55 (verse 2), we see, states that God taught the Qur'an. Likewise, on the level of the Qur'an as a whole, one finds that the first and last chapters feature two salient, particular nouns, and that the final verse of 54 features a third; this is to say, in the three places (1:3; 54:55, and 114:2) we have *maalik*, *maliik*, *malik*, the three Arabic forms for “King” or “Master.” Considering these correspondences, one recalls what Mary Douglas has written of ring composition: “As the ending also accords with the exposition, the mid-turn tends to be in concordance with them both. Then the whole piece is densely interconnected.”²²

So, before concluding our study, let us highlight the significance of this place in the text. Structurally, the conjunction of Chapters 54 and 55 is the exact center of the Qur'an. The Qur'an speaks here of being in the presence of an Omnipotent Sovereign . . . the Merciful.

Conclusion

Having reached the end of our study, we see that the Qur'an is a text whose form perfectly supports its meaning. The five main points, as we have noticed, all point to God: The beginning calls on Him, the ending seeks refuge in Him, the middles of the two systems are oriented to the place of His manifestation on earth, and the center is oriented to Him above. Correspondences are numerous and dense, to be sure, but overall they follow a single concentric plan. Parallels and symmetries throughout underscore a greater unity. Every formal element refers to the One God.

We may turn now to a question as old as the one concerning the Qur'an's structure, namely, who put the Book together? Tradition affirms that the Prophet recited the emerging Qur'an to Gabriel (the Angel of Revelation or Holy Spirit) on a yearly basis for verification, and that he did so twice in the year he died. On the other hand, another prominent view holds that the Prophet arranged all verses within chapters, but that after his death a committee of his companions decided on the canonical order of chapters. That the Prophet himself arranged the whole Qur'an (whether or not by divine direction) would appear the most likely scenario, as we will indicate below.

One should mention first, however, that a school of Western scholars has posited that the Qur'an's collection occurred in fact well after the Prophet's death, during, say, the rule of Caliph 'Abd al-Malik (65-86/685-705). Some even consider the possibility that what has been attributed to Muhammad is instead a collective work. The scholars speak of this supposed eventual, late compilation of the Qur'an as a "hurried event," work completed "without elaborate planning," "rushed editing" (the finished "canonical" version was then attributed to an early date in Islamic history to lend it legitimacy, and the community thereafter forgot that the new arrangement was an innovation).¹ It may be noted that these claims extend from a familiar structural criticism on their part, from their perception of inadequacy in the text.

In opposition to these claims, and pointing to a very different conclusion,

stands the edifice of classical commentary on the concatenation of the Qur'an. Indeed, despite the existence of the opinion cited above that a committee of companions determined the chapter order, by the ninth century AH/fifteenth century CE, the study of correlations had convinced a number of Muslim scholars that the chapter order, too, and not just the verse order, was set finally when revelation ended.² Interestingly, an early date for compilation has been indicated lately by science. Radiocarbon dating of a parchment Qur'an found in San'a', Yemen has yielded the following: an 85 percent probability that the particular manuscript was copied before 30/650 (within eighteen years of the Prophet's death in 11/632), and a 99 percent probability that it was copied before 50/670. Moreover, analysis suggests that there existed, predating this copy, a Prophetic prototype.³

Looking at the text itself, we find evidence supporting the conclusion reached earlier by various classical commentators. As Mustansir Mir has observed, "between the *nazm* [composition] of verses and the *nazm* of *surahs* there is affinity of character that is best explained on the assumption that it is due to the same agency, in this case Muhammad." (He goes on to add pointedly, "if Muhammad took care to give a certain arrangement to verses in *surahs*, how could he have remained indifferent to the arrangement of the *surahs* themselves?"⁴) In this study, we have seen that a structural logic of symmetry is seen on the level of the chapter, pair, group, system, and text as a whole. This consistency in underlying structure strongly suggests that the text did not have multiple authors. In short, our study offers further evidence that the entire Qur'an, form and content, traces directly to the Prophet.

We did not set out specifically to address this matter; the conclusion about provenance derives from the evidence at hand. Rather, our concern throughout has related to structure and interpretation. The second major point this study has tried to make, then, besides that about the text's formal completeness, involves structure's function as a guide to meaning. Accordingly, we have attempted to highlight Qur'anic themes that have special significance by virtue of their central placement within rings. Another example of this kind of interpretation is the keen analysis undertaken recently by Carl Ernst. He has examined Chapter 60, *The Woman Tested*, revealed in an atmosphere of distrust during the prevalence of war with the Meccans, and he finds that the chapter, notwithstanding contemporary circumstances, "preserves at its heart a sublime hope that God may make it possible for affection to exist between enemies."⁵

Yet another example of this kind of analysis would be the impressive reading by Michel Cuypers of [Chapter 5](#), *The Table*. This chapter was revealed around the time of the farewell pilgrimage to Mecca in 10 AH/March 632 and may be understood as the last word of the Qur'an. On this occasion, the Prophet led some 30,000 believers to the Sacred House built by Abraham and Ishmael to perform rites commemorating the piety of Abraham—such that he was willing to sacrifice his son—and God's acceptance of a ram. It was the only pilgrimage the Prophet ever undertook, and it represents total victory of Islam over polytheism. The Ka'ba, since the conquest of Mecca in 8/630, had been cleared of idols, and now the Islamic pilgrimage replaced what had become a pagan one.

Such was the context of the farewell pilgrimage in terms of the long struggle against the disbelievers. But there was another context associated with it, as Cuypers has shown in his reading of [Chapter 5](#). The pilgrimage, in fact, represents a portentous moment in religious history, a confirmation and fulfillment of the missions of both Moses and Jesus. It will be recalled that Moses never reached the Promised Land: having led the Children of Israel from Egypt, through Sinai, he looked out at Jerusalem from Mount Nebo in Jordan, and he died there. But the Prophet, having endured a time of exile and given a code of law, led his throng of believers finally into Mecca. In this light we may contemplate the references to Moses in 5:20-26.

At the same time, Muhammad's farewell pilgrimage and the celebration of the Feast of the Sacrifice at its conclusion bear a meaningful resemblance to Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem and the Last Supper. Walter Wagner reminds us here of the Biblical situation:

Jesus and his entourage entered Jerusalem shortly before a Passover (ca. 30-32 CE). It was widely believed among apocalyptically minded Jews that the messiah-liberator would appear in Jerusalem during Passover to drive out the oppressor, purify the Temple, and restore Jews to their rightful status and/or inaugurate the Kingdom of God. Toward the end of a particularly acrimonious week, Jesus shared a meal that included wine with his immediate followers. The supper was likened to the Passover and was reported to have used Sinaitic-New Covenantal language. . . .⁶

Turning to Cuypers, we find him making the connection between the allusive description of this supper in *The Table* and the Prophet's situation. Reviewing the structure of the chapter, he writes:

Now it is clear why the account of [the banquet Jesus celebrated with his Disciples] remains incomplete: its completion is in fact the Muslim pilgrimage. The end of the sura thus returns to the start and finds its solution here. [...] The covenant celebrated by Jesus with his apostles is perpetuated by the Muslim pilgrimage.⁷

To this key insight by Cuypers, we might add that the reference to the raising up of Jesus at the conclusion of *The Table* apparently prefigures the coming end of Muhammad's mission (he would die three months later at Medina, in June 11/632). Yet God would remain watchful, as always; and, as ever, blessed comfort awaited those who adhered to truth, while others faced eternal punishment (5:117-20).

Again, as we have indicated previously, the parallel between the Prophet's experience and those of earlier prophets emphasizes their unity of message. In this regard, A. Johns has remarked:

It is often overlooked, how rich and diverse an assembly these prophets [presented in the Qur'an] were, or what their role in salvation history was, from the beginning of time up to the call of Muhammad. Each refracts an aspect of Muhammad's experience. They are his brothers in salvation history. His teaching is what they taught.⁸

The simple, recurring message is to believe in God and worship Him only, fear His Judgment (while being confident of His Mercy), lead a life of good works. Such is the message of all prophets, revealed this time for posterity in the form an Arabic Recitation.

Lastly, let us try to ponder, in literary terms, the Qur'an's appearance as a happening or "creative irruption" at a moment of history. W. Montgomery Watt, who has focused on the Prophet's career as a leader, writes, "The more one reflects on the history of Muhammad and of early Islam, the more one is amazed at the vastness of his achievement. Circumstances presented him with an opportunity such as few men have had, but the man was fully matched with the hour."⁹ But as regards the phenomenon of the text, our immediate concern, we are presented with the case of someone who, through forty years of life, had shown no special inclination to literature (he was a merchant). Suddenly he began coming forth, in the context of an extraordinarily rich literary tradition, with what has always been regarded as completely beyond compare, inimitable.

So much can be said positively. Whether he did so merely on his own, or rather was inspired from above, remains a question of faith.

Appendix A: Structural Summaries

Chapter 2: The Cow

Section A (1-39)

a (1-20)

 b (21-29)

a' (30-39)

1-5 The Qur'an is **guidance** to those who fear God, the believers; they are **guided** by their Lord and they will be the ones to prosper

6-20 As to the disbelievers, God has sealed their ears and veiled their eyes, and a great punishment awaits them; some people pretend to believe, but in their hearts is a disease; they have not been guided; similitudes about their being without hearing and sight

21-24 Exhortation for people to worship God, their Creator, Maker of heaven and earth; challenge for doubters to produce the like of a Qur'anic chapter; if they cannot, then they should fear the Fire

25-27 Instruction to Prophet: give glad tidings to those who believe and do good works that they will have Gardens with flowing streams, plentiful fruits, and pure spouses; God disdains not to use even the smallest of comparisons; the believers know a similitude to be the truth from their Lord; disbelievers ask what God means by it; by such He causes many to stray and **He guides** many; but it is only the rebellious whom He causes to stray; those who break God's covenant and make corruption on earth are the losers

28-29 Question to disbelievers: how can you reject God, when He gave you life, will cause you to die, and will resurrect you? He created heaven and earth, and He knows all things

30-37 God created Adam to be His vicegerent on earth and taught him names of all things; He ordered angels to bow down before Adam; Satan, a disbeliever, refused; Satan tempted Adam and wife to eat of forbidden tree,

causing them to be expelled from the Garden; Adam received words from God; God is forgiving

38-39 God expelled Adam, Eve, and Satan (one of the jinn) from the Garden; those who receive God's **guidance**, those who follow God's guidance, have nothing to dread, whereas the disbelievers will abide in the Fire

Section B (40-112)

a (40-48)

b (49-93)

a' (94-112)

40-41 Exhortation to Children of Israel: remember the favor God bestowed on you and fulfill your covenant; believe in what God has revealed confirming the revelation already in your possession; fear God alone

42-46 **Do not conceal** the truth **when you know** it; bow in prayer with those who pray and give alms; do you command others to be pious and forget yourselves, even though you recite the Scripture? seek help with patience and prayer; indeed, this is difficult except for those who are humble and know they will return to their Lord

47-48 Exhortation to Children of Israel: remember the favor God bestowed on you; fear a Day when no soul will be able to help another and no intercession will be accepted for anyone

49-61 Remember when God saved you from the people of Pharaoh and caused them to be drowned in the sea; God appointed forty nights (for Moses on Mount Sinai), so that you might be guided; but you worshiped the *calf*, yet God was forgiving; you wished to see God; God struck you with lightning and then revived you, so that you might be grateful; God supplied nourishment to you in the desert, but you complained of its monotony; such as them incurred God's wrath and went on transgressing

62 Those who believe, and the Jews, Christians and Sabians—all those who believe in God and the Last Day, and who do good works will have their reward with their Lord; they have nothing to dread

63-66 Remember when God took your pledge and made Mount Sinai tower above you, commanding you to hold firmly to what He had given you; thereafter you turned back, and had it not been for God's grace and mercy

you would have been among the losers; among you were those who violated the Sabbath, and God made an example of them

67-74 Remember when Moses said to his people that God commanded them to sacrifice a *cow*; people asked three questions about the exact type of cow before complying, though they almost did not; and remember when you killed a man and disputed over who did it, but **God would bring forth what you hid**; God commanded that the body be struck with a piece (of the cow); thus God brings the dead to life and shows you His signs; thereafter your hearts hardened; **God is not unaware** of what you do

75-79 Address to believers: can you hope that such people will believe you, when some of them deliberately twisted God's word? when they meet the believers, they affirm belief, but in private they seek ways to argue with you about God's revelation; God knows what they hide; some of them write words with their own hands and claim the words are from God; they do so for a miserable price; woe to them

80-82 They say that the Fire will only touch them for a few days; say to them: have you taken a pledge from God to this effect, or are you saying what you do not know? those who do evil will be surrounded by the Fire, while those who have faith and do good will abide in the Garden

83-93 Remember when God took a pledge from the Children of Israel to worship no god but God, to keep up the prayer, to do good and give alms, but you turned back; they pledged not to shed blood amongst each other, but here you do it; a great penalty awaits such as you; God gave Moses the Scripture and sent messengers after him in succession; God gave Jesus son of Mary clear signs; but some prophets you disbelieve, others you slay; when a Scripture comes to them, confirming what is with them, they refuse to believe; they sell their souls for a miserable price; Moses came to you with clear signs, but you worshiped the *calf*; remember when God caused the Mount to tower above you and commanded to hold tight to what God had given you, you disobeyed; say: your faith causes you to do evil things, if you really are believers

94-96 Say to the Children of Israel: if the final home with God be yours exclusively, then wish for death; but they will not wish for death, due to what they have done and what awaits them; indeed, they are most keen for life

97-99 Say to the Children of Israel: whoever is an enemy to Gabriel—for he

brings down revelation— whoever is an enemy to God and His angels, God is an enemy to the disbelievers; God has sent down to the Prophet clear signs; none but the rebellious reject them

100-103 Rhetorical question: how is it that every time they make a covenant, a party of them cast it aside? in truth, most of them do not believe; when a Messenger from God came to them, confirming the Scripture they had, some of them **threw it behind their backs**, as if **they did not know**; example of those following what the evil ones said of Solomon; they sold their souls for a cheap price, **if only they knew**; it would have been better for them if they had kept their faith, **if only they knew**

104-109 Address to the believers: say not to the Prophet “watch over us” (which, in Arabic, can be distorted into an insult); say “look at us” and then listen; those who disbelieve among the People of the Book and the pagans do not wish that God should bestow on you any good, yet God chooses for His mercy whomever He will; God does not abrogate or cause to be forgotten a past revelation except that He substitutes something better or similar; God has power over all things; would you question the Prophet as Moses was questioned? many of the People of the Book would turn you back to disbelief out of envy, after the truth has become clear to them; forgive them and forbear, until God fulfills His purpose; God has power over all things

110-12 Observe the prayers and give alms; whatever good you send forth for yourselves, you will find it with God; People of the Book say: none will enter the Garden unless the person be a Jew or a Christian; say to them: furnish your proof if you are truthful; whoever submit their faces to God and do good works will have their reward with their Lord; they have nothing to dread

Section C (113-41)

- a (113-21)
- b (122-33)
- a' (134-41)

113-14 Jews and Christians deny the veracity of each other's religion, even though they recite the Scripture; likewise say those without knowledge; God will judge between them regarding their differences on Resurrection Day; the most unjust are those who prevent God's name from being mentioned in

places of worship; a great penalty awaits them

115-17 To God belongs east and west; God's Face is everywhere; **Christians say God has a son; everything in heavens and on earth worships Him;** He decrees a matter and it is

118-20 Those without knowledge ask for a sign; people before said similar things; the signs are clear to the faithful; God has sent the Prophet as a bearer of good tidings and an admonisher; Jews and Christians will not be satisfied until you follow their ways; God will not help those who follow the desires of the Jews and Christians after knowledge has come to you; those who recite Scripture as God has given it to them are the believers; those who reject it are the losers

122-24 Exhortation to Children of Israel: remember the favor God bestowed on you; fear a Day when no soul will be able to help another and no intercession will be accepted for anyone; remember that Abraham was tested by words from God, which he fulfilled; God said he would make Abraham a leader to people; Abraham asked for the same for his offspring; he was told that God's promise would not extend to the unjust

125-29 Remember when God made the Ka'ba a place of resort and a sanctuary for people; He commanded Abraham and Ishmael to purify it for worship; Abraham prayed for God to make Mecca city of peace and to provide those who believe with fruits; **Abraham and Ishmael raised the Ka'ba; they prayed for God to make of them and their progeny a community submitting to God's will**, to show them the places for rites, and to forgive them; they prayed for God to send a prophet to recite His verses and to teach the community Scripture and wisdom

130-32 Whoever turns from the religion of Abraham is a fool; God chose Abraham among people in this world, and he will be among the righteous in the next; God commanded him to submit, and he submitted to the God of all peoples; he enjoined his sons to do the same; likewise Jacob told his sons that God had chosen their religion for them and instructed them to remain devoted to God as long as they lived

133-35 Rhetorical question to Jews: were you present when Jacob died? his sons pledged to worship the God of Jacob and his forefathers—Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac—and they submitted to God; they are a people that passed from the earth; they will get what they deserve, as will you; People of

the Book say: become Jews or Christians; say: I follow the religion of Abraham

136-38 Creed: **We believe in God, and in what was revealed to us, and what was revealed to all the prophets; we make no distinction among them, and we bow to Him;** if they believe as you do, then they are guided; if they turn back, then they are in opposition; our religion is that of God; we worship Him

139-41 Rhetorical questions to Jews and Christians: how can you argue with us, when God is our Lord and your Lord and we are all responsible for our actions; do you claim that Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes were Jews or Christians? do you know better than God? they are a people that passed from the earth; they will get what they deserve, as will you

Section D (142-52)

142-43 Regarding prayer orientation: fools will ask (sarcastically) what caused it to change? say: to God belongs east and west; God guides whom He will to a Straight Path; God has made of Muslims a median community to be a witness over other peoples; likewise, the Prophet is a witness over Muslims; **the change in orientation is a test** to see who will follow the Prophet; it was a hard test, except to those God has guided; God would never let your faith be in vain

144-46 God has seen Prophet turning his face to the heavens; command to Prophet: turn your face to the Sacred Mosque; command to believers: wherever you are, turn your faces to the Sacred Mosque; People of the Book know this is the truth; they would not pray according to your orientation, nor would you pray according to theirs, nor would they pray according to each other's; they know this, but some of them conceal the truth

147-48 Adjuration: the truth (regarding the change in prayer orientation) is from your Lord, so **do not doubt**; each community has its own direction, so vie in goodness and God will bring you together

149-50 Command to Prophet: wherever you are, turn your face to the Sacred Mosque; command to believers: wherever you are, turn your faces to the Sacred Mosque; fear not the wrongdoers, but fear God, so that He may complete His favor to you and you may be guided

151-52 God has sent an apostle from among you, instructing you in the Scripture and wisdom; remember God and He will remember you; be grateful and **do not disbelieve**

Section C' (153-77)

153-62 Exhortation to believers: seek help with patience and prayer; those who are killed in God's cause are not dead; you will be tested with something of fear and hardship; God's mercy is on those who are steadfast and know they will return to Him; Safa and Marwa are among the rites of God; those who conceal God's signs are cursed, except for those who repent: for them God is forgiving; those who disbelieve and die disbelievers will abide in great torment

163-73 There is no god but God, the Merciful, the Compassionate; signs of God in the heavens and on earth; some people worship others as rivals to God; a great penalty awaits them; those who follow and those who are followed in this will disown each other, but they will not leave the Fire; exhortation to people: eat of what is lawful and good from the earth, and do not follow the footsteps of Satan; he commands you to do evil and to say about God what you do not know; some follow their forefathers, even though their forefathers were not guided; calling to disbelievers is like a herder calling to that which only hears shouts and cries but does not understand; exhortation to believers: eat of the good things God has provided you; He has only forbidden carrion, blood, swine, and that over which has been invoked other than God's name; but if one must eat such things, due to hunger, then God is forgiving and compassionate

174-77 Those who conceal what God has revealed of the Scripture will not be spared the Fire; God has sent down the Scripture in truth; those who have differed about it are far away in opposition; righteousness is not whether you face east or west; righteousness is to believe in God, the Last Day, the angels, the Scripture, and the prophets, to do good works and observe the prayer, and to be patient in adversity

Section B' (178-242)

178-82 Equality in retribution; bequests

183-89 Fasting, superstitions

190-94 Fighting/jihad

195-207 Spending; performing Hajj, offering sacrifice

208-14 Exhortation to believers: enter Islam wholeheartedly; do not follow the footsteps of Satan; if you backslide after the clear signs have come to you, know that God is mighty and wise; to God all matters return; ask the Children of Israel how many clear signs God brought them; whoever alters God's blessings after having received them will face a stern punishment; the life of this world has been made attractive to disbelievers, and they scoff at believers, but those who fear God will be above them on Resurrection Day; people were once a single community, and God sent the prophets to bring good tidings and warn; He sent the Scripture to judge between people in their differences; they disagreed only out of rivalry; God has guided the believers regarding those differences; God guides whom He will to a Straight Path; reminder to believers: do not think you will enter the Garden without first enduring trials; God's help is near

215 Spending in charity

216-18 Fighting/jihad

219 Drinking wine, gambling

220-42 Orphans, marriage and divorce, widows

Section A' (243-86)

243-53 Example of those who left their homes, fearing death; God said they should die and then He revived them; command to fight in God's cause; He will reward those who do; to God all will return; example of appointment of Saul as worthy king, though he had not been rich, after Israelites had been expelled from their homes; example of Israelites confronting the more powerful Philistines; Israelites prayed for God's help against the disbelievers; David slew Goliath; assurance that Muhammad is one of the prophets; God granted prophets different capabilities and gifts; had God willed, succeeding generations of people would not have fought each other; God fulfills His plan

254 Exhortation to believers: give of the bounties God has provided you, before the Day comes when there is no bargaining or intercession

255-60 There is no god but God, the Living, the Eternal; He never tires; to Him belongs all in the heavens and on earth; none can intercede with Him except whom He permits; He knows what precedes His creatures and what lies behind them, and none can grasp any of His knowledge except by His will; His throne extends over the heavens and earth, and He never fatigues in upholding them; He is the Most High, the Almighty; there is no compulsion in religion; the right way has become distinct from the wrong way; whoever rejects false gods and believes in God has grasped the firmest hand-hold, one that will never break; God knows all; He is the Protector of those who believe; He will lead them from Darkness to Light; those who disbelieve will be led by false gods from Light to Darkness; they will abide in the Fire; example of Abraham arguing with ruler, who thought himself great, about God; Abraham said that God is the One Who causes the sun to rise, confounding the ruler; example of God raising man to life; Abraham asked God to show him how He resurrests; God tells Abraham to train four birds to come back to him, and then put them on four separate hilltops and call them; thus souls will return to God

261-83 Parables about charity; charity and its rewards; usury and its punishments; debts

284-86 To God belongs all; He forgives whom He pleases and punishes whom He pleases; Prophet has believed as have all the prophets before; to God all people return; prayer: forgive us, do not burden us with more than we can bear, and help us against the disbelievers

Chapter 3: *The Family of 'Imran*

Section A (1-30)

1-9 There is no god but God, the Living, the Eternal; He sent down the Scripture to the Prophet in truth, confirming what went before it; previously He sent down the Torah and the Gospels as a guidance to people; those who reject God's signs will suffer severe torment; nothing is hidden from Him; He shapes people in wombs; there is no god but God; He sent down the Scripture to the Prophet; some verses are precise in meaning, and some contain ambiguities; those with perversity in their hearts follow what contain ambiguities, seeking discord and hidden meanings; no one knows the hidden meanings except God; those grounded in knowledge say: we believe in the Scripture: it is all from our Lord; they ask God not to let their hearts stray

after guidance; they ask for forgiveness and are mindful that God will gather all people on Judgment Day

10-18 For those who disbelieve, their wealth and progeny will not avail them: they will be fuel for the Fire; their punishment will be like that of Pharaoh and those before him; God is strict in punishment; there has already been a sign when the two armies met: those fighting in God's cause saw an army twice their size, but God helps whom He will; women, sons, and possessions have been made attractive in the eyes of men, but the best return is to God; the righteous will have Gardens with rivers flowing beneath them and pure companions; these are rewards for God's servants, those who believe, who ask for forgiveness for their sins, who are steadfast, who worship devoutly and spend of their wealth in God's cause, who acknowledge that there is no god but God

19-30 The religion before God is submission to Him; those who were given the Scripture differed about it due to rivalry; if they dispute with you (the Prophet), say: I have submitted my face to God, as have those who follow me; if they also submit, then they are guided; if they do not, the Prophet's duty is but to convey the message; those who deny God's signs, who kill the prophets, will have no helper in the Hereafter; those who have been given a part of the Scripture are invited to God's Book, but they decline, saying that the Fire will touch them only for a few days; God will gather them on a Day when each soul will get what it deserves; God favors whom He will and lowers whom He will; He alternates night and day, and He puts a limit on life and resurrects; the believers should not take disbelievers for friends or helpers; God knows what you hide in your hearts; on Judgment Day each soul will get what it deserves; God warns you to be wary of Him, but God is also full of kindness to His servants

Section B (31-63)

31-34 Message to believers: if you love God, **follow His Prophet**, and God will love you and forgive your sins; God does not love those who turn back; God chose Adam, Noah, the family of Abraham, and the family of 'Imran above all peoples; God knows all

35-47 Births of Mary, John the Baptist, Jesus

48-54 Message from Jesus: part of what was forbidden before has now been

made lawful; **fear God and obey me; God is my Lord and yours, so worship Him:** this is a Straight Path; most people disbelieve Jesus, but the Disciples believe in what he reveals and follow him

55-57 Raising up of Jesus to God; Day of Resurrection

58-63 Message to believers: Jesus is just like Adam before God; the truth (the Prophet brings) comes from your Lord; there is no god but God; He is aware of those who turn back and cause corruption

Section C (64-99)

64-68 Message to People of the Book: let us agree that we worship God alone; why do you dispute with us about Abraham, when the Torah and Gospel were not revealed until after him? Abraham was not a Jew nor a Christian, but one who submitted wholly to God; those nearest in relation to him are those who follow his way

69-83 Some People of the Book seek to lead you astray; God chooses for His mercy whom He will; some People of the Book keep their pledges, pay back what they are entrusted, and fear God; God loves those who fear Him

84 Creed: We believe in God, and in what was revealed to us, and what was revealed to all the prophets; we make no distinction among them, and we bow to Him

85-92 A torment awaits those who reject faith after having believed; God is forgiving to those who make amends; those who die disbelieving will face a grievous penalty; you will not attain righteousness until you spend freely for God of what you love

93-99 Before the Torah was revealed, all food was lawful to the Children of Israel except what Israel made unlawful for itself; follow the religion of Abraham; the first house of worship was at Mecca; pilgrimage to it is duty for those who can make the journey; message to People of the Book: why do you reject God's signs and obstruct believers from the path of God, trying to make it crooked? God is not unaware of what you do

Section D (100-109)

100-103 Message to believers: some People of the Book would render you disbelievers; how can you deny faith when God's verses are recited to you

and the Prophet is in your midst? fear God as He should be feared and die not except devoted to Him; hold fast together to God's rope, and do not split into factions; remember that you were enemies to each other and God joined you as brothers, and that you were on the brink of Hellfire and He saved you from it

104 Let there emerge from you a community that calls to good, enjoining right and forbidding wrong: they will be the successful ones

104-109 Message to believers: do not be like those who are divided and dispute with each other after having received clear signs; on Judgment Day disbelievers' faces will be darkened, while believers' faces will be brightened; these are God's verses recited to you; God does not will injustice for peoples; to God belongs all in the heavens and on earth, and to Him all things return

Section C' (110-17)

110-12 Message to believers: you are the best community, enjoining right, forbidding wrong, and believing in God; most People of the Book are transgressors; they will not harm you much, and if they come out to fight you they will turn and will not be helped; shame covers them wherever they go, except where they hold to God's rope; they have drawn on themselves God's wrath because they disbelieved His signs and killed the prophets

113-15 Not all People of the Book are alike: some of them recite God's verses at night and bow in worship; they believe in God and Judgment Day, enjoin right and forbid wrong, and race to do good deeds: they are among the righteous; none of their good deeds will be rejected; God knows who are the pious ones

116-17 Disbelievers will dwell in the Fire; neither their wealth nor their children will help them against God; they have wronged themselves

Section B' (118-79)

118-20 Message to believers: do not take outsiders (hypocrites) into your ranks; they only desire your ruin; they say that they believe when they meet you, but in private they rage; they grieve at any good that befalls you and rejoice at any misfortune; if you are steadfast and **fear God**, their scheming will not harm you; God envelops all that they do

121-29 Encouragement of believers: remember when two parties of you were about to lose heart (at Uhud); God was their protector; God had helped you at Badr when you were a small force; Prophet assured believers that angels would help them, so that the disbelievers would be frustrated in their design; everything in the heavens and on earth belongs to God; He forgives whom He will and punishes whom He will; God is forgiving and compassionate

130-36 Message to believers: do not collect usurious interest; **fear God** so that you may be successful; fear the Fire; obey God and His Prophet, so that you may obtain mercy; race for your Lord's forgiveness; for those who spend freely of their wealth, in good times and bad, who pardon others and ask for God's forgiveness, there are Gardens prepared with rivers flowing underneath; this is an excellent recompense for those who do good

137-65 Do not despair: if a wound touched you (at Uhud), a similar wound touched your enemies (at Badr); do not think that you would enter the Garden without being tested; Muhammad is no more than a Prophet; other prophets before him died; if he died or were killed, would you turn back? if you obey the disbelievers, they will turn you back; God has fulfilled His promise: you were routing the enemy, until you flinched and disputed among yourselves about the Prophet's order and disobeyed it; God has now forgiven you; those who turned back when the two armies met—it was Satan who caused them to slip; God has now forgiven them; He is forgiving and forbearing; do not be like the disbelievers who anguish over those on their side who are killed; if you die fighting for God, you are gathered unto Him; if God helps you, none can defeat you; God has favored you by sending the Prophet in your midst; do not wonder that a single disaster has stricken you, when one twice its size has stricken your enemies; you brought this disaster on yourselves; God has power over all things

166-79 What happened on the day the two armies met was to distinguish between the believers and the hypocrites; do not think that of those who are slain in God's cause are dead: they are alive in their Lord's presence and provided for; those who answered God's call even when they were injured have a great reward; it is Satan who urges you to fear his followers; do not fear them, but **fear God**; the disbelievers have been given a respite, but a terrible punishment awaits them; God will not leave the believers as they are until He separates the evil from the good; believe in God and His Prophets, and if you believe and do good works, you will have a great reward

Section A' (180-200)

180-88 Do not think that those who are stingy with what God has given them will benefit; those who sneer at giving to God's cause and slay the prophets will taste the Fire; they have rejected clear signs and slain prophets before; every soul tastes death, and on Resurrection Day every soul will get what it deserves; believers will certainly be tested in their possessions and selves, and will hear much that pains them from the People of the Book and the disbelievers, but if they are steadfast and pious, that will be a determining factor; remember that God made a covenant with the People of the Book to make it known to people, but they concealed it behind their backs; they made a miserable bargain; do not think that those who exult in what they have done and love to be praised for things they have not done will escape penalty: a terrible punishment awaits them

189-95 To God belongs all; in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day, there are signs for people of understanding; those who remember God while standing, sitting, and lying down, and contemplate His creation, those who pray for salvation, who hear the call and believe, who pray for forgiveness and ask to be joined with the righteous: God has heard their prayer; He has responded: never will I allow the work of any one of you to be lost, and those who have been driven from their homes or suffered in My cause, I will blot out their sins and admit them to Gardens with rivers flowing underneath; this is a reward from God, and with God is the best of rewards

196-200 Do not be deceived by the strutting of the disbelievers: their final abode is Hell; for those who fear their Lord, there are Gardens with rivers flowing underneath; some People of the Book believe in God, in what was revealed to them and what was revealed to the Prophet; they bow humbly to God, and they do not barter God's signs for a miserable gain; they have their reward with their Lord; message to believers: be steadfast, strengthen each other, and fear God, so that you may be successful

Chapter 12: Joseph

Section A' (102-111)

102-104 Message to Prophet: this is one of the stories revealed to you; but no matter how keen you are, most people will not believe; you do not ask

recompense; God's revelation is but a reminder to all peoples

105-108 Rhetorical statement: how many signs in heaven and earth do they turn from! most of them believe not in God except in association with other gods beside Him; rhetorical question: are they safe from God's punishment when it will descend upon them suddenly? message to Prophet: say: I call people unto God on clear evidence—I do, and so do those who follow me—and never will I associate partners with God

109-111 Message to Prophet: We sent others before you and made revelations to them, ones chosen from the people of their towns; did they not travel through the land and see the end of those who came before them? yet the home of the Hereafter is better for those who fear God; when they lost hope and were dismissed as liars, Our help came to them; We will save whom We will, whereas Our punishment will not be warded off from the guilty; in their stories there is instruction for people of understanding; this revelation is not a fabrication, but rather a confirmation of what came before it, an explanation of everything, and a guide and a mercy to those who believe

Chapter 13: Thunder

Section A (1-17)

1-4 Signs from God: the verses of the Qur'an, the heavens He has raised, the sun and moon running according to courses He has set; such signs He makes clear so that people may be certain of meeting the Lord; He has spread out the earth, with its fixed mountains and rivers running; He draws night over and day; earth's food He has caused to grow

5-11 Disbelievers mock the idea of a second creation (the Resurrection) and ask for it to be hastened; they ask for a sign from the Prophet; God knows what is open and what is concealed; He will not change a people's state until they have changed what is in themselves, yet if He wills a people's punishment, then there can be no turning it back

12-15 God shows you lightning, inspiring fear and hope; thunder glorifies Him, as do angels in awe too; He casts thunderbolts and strikes whom He will; yet some people dispute about God; He is severe in punishment; the true prayer is to Him; invoking others is futile; all things in heaven and on earth prostrate themselves before God, as do their shadows morning and afternoon

16 God is Lord of heavens and earth; rhetorical questions: why do disbelievers

take protectors other than Him, who have no power for harm or good? have the partners they ascribe to Him created anything like His creation? God is the Creator of all things, the One, the Almighty

17 God sends water from the sky, and riverbeds flow according to their measure; froth surfaces, and like froth from the metal heated to make tools or ornaments, what is useless disappears and what is of benefit remains; thus God will separate truth from vanity

Section B (18-29)

18-22 **For those who respond to their Lord are the best rewards; for those who do not, the abode of Hell**—what the negligent would trade all in the heavens and on earth, were that in their possession, to ransom themselves from; rhetorical question: can someone who knows the revelation from God as the truth be compared to one who is blind? only people of understanding pay heed—those who fulfill God's covenant, who join what God has commanded to be joined and who fear the Reckoning, who steadfastly seek the Face of their Lord, who pray regularly, who repel evil with good; for them is the reward of the final home

23-24 **The righteous will enter Gardens of Bliss—they, as well as those righteous of their ancestors, spouses, and descendants;** from every gate angels will salute them: “Peace be upon you, for your steadfastness. How excellent is your final home!”

25-29 Those who break God's covenant, who sever what God has commanded to be joined, and who spread corruption in the land, for them is the dreadful home; God increases the provision for whom He wills, and decreases it for whom He wills; though the worldly rejoice in this world, it is but fleeting enjoyment compared to the Hereafter; disbelievers ask for a sign; God lets stray whom He wills; He guides to Himself those who are penitent, those who believe and pay heed; **for those who believe and do righteous deeds is a blessed, final homecoming**

Section A' (30-43)

30-34 Message to Prophet: **We have sent you to recite what We have revealed,** yet people disbelieve God; this is verily a Qur'an that could move mountains; disaster will not cease to strike the disbelievers or fall close to

their homes until God's promise is fulfilled; other prophets before have been mocked; those who disbelieve and ascribe partners to God will be severely punished; they have no protectors against God

35-36 The Garden is promised to those who fear God, while for the disbelievers the destination is the Fire; those to whom God has vouchsafed the Scripture rejoice in it; yet some reject parts of it; message to Prophet: say: I am commanded to worship God alone; I call unto Him, and to Him is my return

37-43 Message to Prophet: God has revealed it (the Qur'an) as an Arabic decree; were you to follow the disbelievers' desires after what has been revealed to you, you would have no protector against God; We sent apostles before and gave them wives and offspring; never did an apostle bring forth a sign except as God permitted; God confirms or erases what He will, and the source of the Scripture is with Him; whether We will show you during your lifetime some of what We threaten them with, or take you up—**your duty is to deliver the message** and Our part is the Reckoning; people before also schemed, but the master plan is God's; He knows the doings of every soul; the disbelievers will learn in the end who has the excellent home; disbelievers deny you are a messenger; say: God, and those who have knowledge of the Scripture, be sufficient witness between us

Chapter 50: *Qaf*

Section A (1-15)

Section B (16-35)

Section A' (36-45)

1–15 Oath by the glorious **Qur'an**; disbelievers deny Resurrection; proofs from nature that God gives new life; people of Noah and of Rass; Thamud, 'Ad, Pharaoh, Lot's brethren; people of the Thicket and of Tubba—they all disbelieved and met their fate; God not wearied by first creation

16–35 God created humankind and knows their thoughts; two angels record every word and deed; on Day of Resurrection, one angel will drive each person forth and the other will bear witness; God will not tolerate argument: **He sent warning** in advance and does no injustice to His servants; Hell will be filled with sinners, yet able to take more; the Garden will be brought near to those who feared God

36–45 God destroyed many generations before; He created heavens and earth without tiring; call to be patient, praise the Lord, and wait for Resurrection; the final goal is to God; instruction to Prophet: remind, with the **Qur'an**, those who fear God's warning

Chapter 51: The Raisers of Dust

Section A (1-23)

Section B (24-46)

Section A' (47-60)

1–23 Oaths that **Judgment Day is coming**; those in error and confusion will be punished by the Fire; those who feared God and were righteous will enjoy Gardens with springs; on earth and among people are signs for believers; **in sky is sustenance and that which awaits you**; oath by the Lord of heaven and earth that the message is true

24–46 **Evidence of God's mercy**: angels visit Abraham (greetings of "Peace") and tell him that his wife will bear a son endowed with knowledge; **evidence of God's punishment**: destruction of a sinful people (brethren of Lot from Sodom and Gomorrah), of Pharaoh and his supporters, of 'Ad, Thamud, and people of Noah

47–60 God constructed sky, spread out earth, and made pairs of all things that people might take note; command to turn to God and worship no god but Him; instruction to Prophet: remind people, for admonition benefits the believers; God created jinn and humans so that they may serve God; **God gives sustenance; woe to disbelievers on the Day they have been promised**

Chapter 52: The Mountain

Section A (1-28)

Section B (29-43)

Section A' (44-49)

1–28 Oaths that God's punishment is coming; sky will sway back and forth; on that Day disbelievers will be thrust into the Fire; their patience or lack thereof in Hell will make no difference; those who feared God will be in Gardens, on couches among beautiful companions, joined by the believers of

their relatives, served by youths; they will recall feeling pity aforetime for their people and praying to God; in Heaven they will observe His grace, **saying: “He is the Good, the Compassionate”**

29–43 Instruction to Prophet: remind people of God’s message; responses to pagan claims: **Prophet, reminding people of God’s blessings**, is not a soothsayer, nor one possessed, nor a poet; let the disbelievers produce a similar recital if that by the Prophet is fabricated; rhetorical questions: did they create or did God? do they have access to heavenly secrets? does God have daughters while they have sons? do they make plots while God has something in store for them? do they have a god other than God?

44–49 Disbelievers would consider part of the sky falling as a mere heap of clouds; instructions to Prophet: leave them for their Day of Reckoning, when their plotting will not avail them; be patient and **glorify God**

Chapter 53: *The Star*

Section A (1-28)

Section B (29-32)

Section A' (33-62)

1–28 Oath by the star when it sets that **Prophet has not gone astray**; the message is inspiration sent down to him; references to what Prophet saw when he (Gabriel) appeared at the highest horizon, and again near the Lotus Tree of the Utmost Boundary; responses to pagans: they have not seen their goddesses, though they name them; intercession by any number of the heavens’ angels will not be of avail except if they receive God’s permission, and according to His will and for people with whom He is pleased; disbelievers give angels female names based on conjecture

29-32 Instruction to Prophet: shun those who turn from God’s message; He knows **those who stray and those who are guided**; He will repay those who do evil according to their actions, and those who do good works with what is best; God is ample in forgiveness to those who commit small faults; God knows who are pious

33-62 Questions to Prophet: have you seen **the person who turns away?** can he see the unseen? has he not been apprised of the Scripture of Moses, and of Abraham who fulfilled his duty? he will see the result of his labor; the final

goal is to God; He is the One Who creates and destroys; He will undertake the Resurrection; He is the Lord of Sirius (the brightest star); He destroyed ‘Ad, Thamud, the people of Noah, and he brought down the cities (of Sodom and Gomorrah); Judgment is approaching; command to people: worship God

Chapter 56: *The Event*

Section A (1-56)

 Section B (57-87)

Section A' (88-96)

1–10 Introduction: **when the Event comes to pass, no one will be able to deny it**; people will be sorted into three classes: those on the Right, those on the Left, and those in Front

11–26 Those in Front will be nearest to God, consisting of many from the past and a few from later times; they will be in Gardens of Bliss, on couches facing each other, being served drinks, fruits, and fowl, with beautiful companions, a reward for their past deeds; greetings of “Peace”

27–40 Those on the Right will be among lotus and acacia trees, in shade, by flowing water and abundant fruits, on thrones, with virginal, loving companions; they will consist of many from the past and many from later times

41–56 Those on the Left will be in the midst of searing wind and scalding water, in shade of smoke, due to their past wickedness and denying the Resurrection; they will be eating of the Zaqqum tree and drinking scalding water

57–74 Rhetorical questions to disbelievers: do We create or do you? do We provide sustenance or do you? see the fire you kindle—do We provide wood for it or do you? conclusion: praise the name of your Almighty Lord

75–80 Oath by the setting of the stars that **the message is a noble Qur'an, uncorrupted revelation from the Lord of all peoples**

81–87 Rhetorical questions to disbelievers: do you take this discourse lightly? do you, in return for your livelihood, deny it? challenge to them: restore the soul to a dying person

88–89 If the person dying be among those in Front, then he or she will be in a

Garden of Bliss

90–91 If the person be among those on the Right, then he or she will hear the salutation “Peace”

92–94 If the person be among those who deny (guidance) and go astray, then he or she will be recompensed with scalding water and burning Hellfire

95-96 Conclusion: **this message is certain truth**; command: praise the name of your Almighty Lord

Appendix B

Chapter Pairs

Below we indicate the chapter pairs occurring in the Qur'an, which total over fifty. With the exception of 43-44, 45-46, 47-48, and 63-64, these have all been previously identified by such scholars as Islahi, Mir, and Cuypers.¹ For the sake of brevity, we identify here only certain correspondences and relationships in each of the pairs; in all likelihood, many more exist.

Chapters 2-3

Discussed in our third chapter above.

Chapters 4-5

These two long Medinan chapters both contain legislative sections and, following Chapters 2-3, continue to address the People of the Book. Examples of correspondences are the injunctions about marriage and dowries (4:4 and 5:5), the references to guidance for the People of the Book and their going astray (4:44 and 5:44), the statements about God's bringing people together on the Day of Judgment and the comfort on that Day for various communities of believers (4:87 and 5:69), and the warnings about Satan (4:117-20 and 5:90-91). The chapters are also tied at their intersection by the description of the message as Light (4:174 and 5:15) and at their outer ends by the identification of God as Raqib, Watcher (4:1 and 5:117).

Chapters 6-7

These two long late Meccan chapters are linked by the theme of the destruction of towns for disbelief. The theme is introduced early in [Chapter 6](#) (vv. 6, 11), and it is repeated at the beginning of Chapter 7 (v. 4). Toward the middle of [Chapter 6](#) (v. 92), there occurs a statement that the Qur'an is sent down as a blessed Book to the Prophet so that he may warn the Mother of Towns (Mecca)

and those around her. Correspondingly, we find in a similar place in Chapter 7 (vv. 94, 96-98, 101) five statements and rhetorical questions about earlier, futile warnings by prophets to towns. Note also the connection between the opening praise of God and the closing description of exaltation by those near to Him (6:1 and 7:206).

Chapters 8-9

These two Medinan chapters were both revealed when the Muslim community was under threat, the former after the victory at Badr in 2/624, when the Quraysh of Mecca were gathering forces for a major counterattack, and the latter after the conquest of Mecca in 8/630, when Bedouin fighters to the south remained hostile and belligerency was expected from the Byzantines to the north. Both chapters exhort the Muslims to fight, but they also emphasize forgiveness and repentance (as in 8:38, and in the title of Chapter 9, *Repentance*). Examples of correspondences include the theme of going out to fight disbelievers (8:5 and 9:5), that of opposing the Prophet (8:13 and 9:13), and that of God's helping the believers at Badr and at Hunayn southeast of Mecca (8:26 and 9:26). Also, the two chapters are tied at their ends by the references to the believers putting their trust in God (8:2 and 9:129).

Chapters 10-11

These two late Meccan chapters are both named after prophets (Jonah and Hud). Correspondences include the affirmations that people's return is to God (10:4 and 11:4); the statements that He created the heavens and the earth in six days (10:3 and 11:7); the demand that the Prophet bring forth another Qur'an and the challenge to disbelievers—if indeed the Qur'an be forged—that they bring forth ten chapters similar to it (10:15 and 11:13); and the exhortations for the Prophet to be patient (10:109 and 11:115). In addition, the chapters are bound at their ends by the call to worship God (10:3 and 11:123).

Chapters 12-13

Discussed in our fourth chapter above.

Chapters 14-15

These two chapters, late and middle Meccan respectively, feature numerous parallels. For example, both emphasize the clarity of the message, it being

revealed in the language of the people (14:4 and 15:1); both refer to the authority granted to Satan to tempt humans (14:22 and 15:42); both cite salutations of “Peace” heard in Paradise (14:23 and 15:46); and both refer to Abraham’s becoming a father in his old age (14:39 and 15:53-55). At their outer ends, both point to God being praised (14:1 and 15:98).

Chapters 16-17

These two chapters, late and middle Meccan respectively like the last pair, also contain numerous parallels. For instance, both chapters include an exaltation of God in the first verse (16:1 and 17:1), both refer to the separation of night and day as among God’s signs (16:12 and 17:12), both call attention to the illogic of the pagans’ claim that God should have daughters—whom they regard as inferior to sons—while they should have male offspring (16:57 and 17:40), and both refer to the Spirit of Revelation, Gabriel (16:102 and 17:85). In addition, the two chapters are bound at their ends by statements of monotheism (16:1 and 17:111).

Chapters 18-19

These two middle Meccan chapters both feature, toward their beginnings, miraculous stories: in the former, one about the resurrection of the Sleepers in the Cave; and in the latter, one about the births of John the Baptist and Jesus (18:9-26 and 19:2-36). Other correspondences include references to the rebellion of Satan (18:50 and 19:44) and the instruction of Moses (18:60-82 and 19:51-52). At their outer ends they are tied by strong rejection of the Christian claim that God has a son (18:4-5 and 19:88-95).

Chapters 20-21

These two middle Meccan chapters, revealed during a period of increasing opposition to the Prophet, are linked by the theme of reassurance. Chapter 20 affirms at the beginning (v. 2) that the Qur'an was not sent down as a cause for distress. It furthermore cites the example of Moses asking God for help and God’s answering his prayer (vv. 25-36) and includes three instances of God telling him not to be afraid (vv. 46, 68, and 77). Chapter 21, in turn, contains numerous examples of prophets whom God protected and/or delivered from distress: Abraham, Lot, Noah, Job, and Jonah (vv. 68-69, 74, 76-77, 83-84, 87-88). In addition, the two chapters are tied at their outer ends by affirmations that

God knows what people say and what they conceal (20:7 and 21:110).

Chapters 22-23

These two chapters, Medinan and middle Meccan respectively, are joined at their intersection by reference to the ultimate prosperity of believers, those who worship God and perform good deeds (22:77 and 23:1-4). Also, they both point to the creation of humankind as evidence of God's power to resurrect (22:5 and 23:12-15), and point both to Noah, 'Ad or Thamud, and Moses as earlier prophets who were rejected by their listeners (22:42, 44 and 23:23-41, 45-48).

Chapters 25-26

These two middle Meccan chapters are an example of pairing by elaboration of theme in the second chapter. Accordingly, we find the stories of Moses and Aaron, Noah, 'Ad, Thamud, Shu'ayb, and Lot referred to in the first chapter (25:35-40) and then treated much more extensively in the second (26:10-68, 105-122, 123-40, 141-59, 160-75, 176-91). In addition, the two chapters correspond at their outer ends by pointed contrast: between those who follow the Prophet and those who follow poets (25:8 and 26:224).

Chapters 27-28

These two chapters, middle and late Meccan respectively, include corresponding descriptions of God's first revelation to Moses (27:7-14; 28:29-36, 40). One finds in them as well similar references to population centers being destroyed (27:52, 54-58 and 28:58-59) and to the blindness of disbelievers (27:66 and 28:66). At their intersection, they are bound by references to the idea of recitation (27:92 and 28:3).

Chapters 29-30

These two late Meccan chapters are of similar length, 69 and 60 verses respectively. They include corresponding references, such as to the meeting of the Lord and to a fixed term (29:5 and 30:8); to the ease, for God, of creation and re-creation (29:19 and 30:27); and to Judgment Day (29:55 and 30:55). At their outer ends, they are bound by the idea that the believers will be tested and by the exhortation to patience (29:2-3 and 30:60).

Chapters 31-32

These two late Meccan chapters are also of similar length, 34 verses and 30 verses (shorter than the lengths of the preceding pair by half). Examples of correspondences include the references to creation (31:10 and 32:7-9) and the idea of Resurrection's exact time (this time being known only to God; 31:34 and 32:28). In addition, one finds a pointed contrast between the prideful turning away from God's verses by disbelievers, and the falling down in prostration at hearing them by believers (31:7 and 32:15).

Chapters 34-35

These late Meccan chapters too are of similar length, 54 and 45 verses. They are paired at their beginnings by similar praise of God, the Creator of the heavens and earth and Possessor of all thereof (34:1 and 35:1). Other correspondences include references to God's subjection/dispatch of the winds (34:12 and 35:9), to the Prophet's being sent as a bearer of both good news and warnings (34:28 and 35:24), and to the disbelievers' tasting of the Fire (34:42 and 35:37).

Chapters 36-37

Like the previous pair, these two middle Meccan chapters are linked at their beginnings. In this case, both chapters open with strings of oaths (36:1-2 and 37:1-3). Other correspondences include references to Noah and the Ark (36:41 and 37:75-82), to armies and divine help (36:74-75 and 37:172-73), and to God's exaltation and power (36:83 and 37:180). Also, the letters YS from the first chapter's opening anticipate the references to Elias or "Il-YS" toward the middle of the second chapter (37:123, 130, from the section dealing with earlier prophets, and 37:75-148).

Chapters 38-39

These two chapters, middle and late Meccan respectively, are linked at their beginnings and ends. Namely, opening rhetorical questions about the issue of polytheism versus monotheism resemble each other (38:5 and 39:3), as do statements toward the end about the God-fearing's entrance into Paradise through opened doors (38:49-50 and 39:73) and the stern reception at Hell's gates for those who disbelieve (38:59-60 and 39:71-72). Also, the two chapters are linked at their intersection by statements about the oneness of God and His attribute of forgiveness (38:65-66 and 39:4-5).

Chapters 40-41

These two late Meccan chapters are linked toward their beginnings, middles, and ends. Namely, we find a correlation among the idea of asking God for forgiveness (40:7 and 41:6), the existence of an intimate friend (40:18 and 41:34; the word for “intimate friend,” *hamim*, likewise echoes the opening letters of these two chapters, HM), and God’s giving to Moses the Book (40:53 and 41:45).

Chapters 43-44

These two middle Meccan chapters resemble each other toward their beginnings and ends. Namely, both chapters open with an oath about the Qur’ān’s bearing wisdom from God (43:2-4 and 44:2-5), and both feature toward their ends similar descriptions of the Garden (43:70-73 and 44:52-55). In addition, they are tied at their outer ends by similar references to the easy, Arabic nature of the Qur’ān (43:3 and 44:58).

Chapters 45-46

These two late Meccan chapters are linked toward their beginnings, middles, and ends. One finds in these locations corresponding statements about the Book’s revelation (45:2 and 46:2), the just recompense of each soul (45:22 and 46:19), and the encirclement of disbelievers by what they once mocked (45:33 and 46:26). Also, the center of the first chapter is connected to the beginning of the second: In both locations, there occurs the affirmation that God has created the heavens and the earth for just ends (45:22 and 46:3).

Chapters 47-48

These two Medinan chapters are joined by the theme of conflict with the pagans. The first chapter was revealed before the Battle of Badr in 2/624, when the believers faced ambush and harassment in the vicinity of the Ka‘ba; it urges the Muslims to smite their adversaries. The next chapter was sent down after the Treaty of Hudaybiyya in 6/628; this chapter underscores the important victory granted to the Muslims by God—they would be able to make the pilgrimage in the following year.

Likewise, several correspondences hold the chapters together, including those references to the admission of believers into Paradise (47:6 and 48:5), to the dissembling of people who are unreceptive to God’s message (47:16-18 and

48:11-13), and to the distinction of believers by their marks of prostration and of hypocrites by their tones of voice (47:30 and 48:29). Also, the two chapters are bound at their outer ends by mention of the Prophet's name (47:2 and 48:29).

Chapters 50-51

These two chapters, middle and early Meccan respectively, are linked by correspondences toward their beginnings, middles, and ends. In these sections, we find references to God's signs on earth and in the sky (50:6-11 and 51:20, 22), testimony of angels (50:17-27 and 51:24-37), and instructions to the Prophet to warn/remind (*dhakkir*) people of God's message (50:45 and 51:55).

Chapters 52-53

These two early Meccan chapters are also linked by correspondences toward their beginnings, middles, and ends. In these sections, we find visions of Paradise (52:17-27 and 53:14-16); instructions to the Prophet about *dhikr*, about proclaiming God's message (52:29 and 53:29); and directions to praise and worship Him (52:48-49 and 53:62).

Chapters 54-55

Discussed in our fifth chapter above.

Chapters 58-59

These two Medinan chapters feature numerous thematic parallels toward their beginnings, middles, and ends. In these places, similar statements occur about resisting God and His Prophet and being punished for it (58:4-5 and 59:3-4), about charity with what bounty God has bestowed (58:12-13 and 59:7-9), and about hypocrisy and the stern consequences for it (58:14-19 and 59:11-17).

Chapters 61-62

These two Medinan chapters are linked by the theme of unity of believers, whether in fighting as a solid structure (61:4) or in Friday communal prayer (62:9). In addition, references to the Torah (61:6 and 62:5) and to the "trade" or "bargain" (*tijara*) made by believers of faithfulness for heavenly reward (61:10-12 and 62:11) also hold the chapters together.

Chapters 63-64

These two Medinan chapters are linked at their beginnings, middles, and ends. Thus, at the beginnings we find references to God's seeing and bearing witness (63:1 and 64:2); and at the ends we find cautionary statements about the distraction or test involved in having wealth and children, along with exhortations to spend in charity (63:9-10 and 64:15-16). Between their centers, there exists a contrast between the idea of God's forgiving the faults of those who believe and work righteousness and His not forgiving the misdeeds of hypocrites (63:6 and 64:9).

Chapters 65-66

These two Medinan chapters, twelve verses each, both treat the theme of domestic relations. Other correspondences toward their beginnings, middles, and ends include identical forms of address to the Prophet (65:1 and 66:1), similar references to God's commands (65:5 and 66:6), and similar references to the Light of guidance and to God's admittance of believers to Gardens underneath which rivers flow (65:11 and 66:8).

Chapters 67-68

These two chapters, middle and early Meccan respectively, are joined toward their beginnings and ends. In these places, we find like references to sight (67:4 and 68:5) and to gloomy faces with downcast eyes (67:27 and 68:43). In addition, the middle of the second chapter points back to the beginning of the first. Namely, the admonition about glorifying God within the parable of the owners of the garden and their subsequent exaltation of Him (68:28-29) recalls the introductory exaltation (67:1).

Chapters 69-70

These two early Meccan chapters are joined toward their beginnings, middles, and ends. In these sections, we find questions about the nature of doom (69:1-3 and 70:1-3), references to the torment of those who disbelieved and withheld their wealth (69:25-37 and 70:11-21), and solemn oaths (69:38-40 and 70:40).

Chapters 71-72

These two middle Meccan chapters, both 28 verses, feature correspondences toward their beginnings, middles, and ends. One finds in these chapters like

introductory references to disbelievers increasing in waywardness and transgression (71:6 and 72:6) and, later, corresponding references to God sending abundant rain to those who would repent and remain pious (71:10-11 and 72:16). And toward their ends, we find a marked contrast between polytheists who cling to their gods and find no helpers among them, and the example of the Prophet, who invokes God only and finds a refuge in Him (71:23, 25 and 72:20, 22).

Chapters 73-74

These two early Meccan chapters are linked by numerous correspondences toward their beginnings, middles, and ends. One finds opening forms of address to the Prophet and then imperatives for him to arise, whether for prayer or preaching (73:1-2 and 74:1-2); imperatives to be patient and to leave those who scorn the message for God to reckon with (73:10-11 and 74:7, 11), frightful depictions of Hell (73:12-13 and 74:26-31); and, before the last verse, affirmations about the message as an admonition (73:19 and 74:54-55).

Chapters 75-76

These two chapters, early and middle Meccan respectively, are linked toward their beginnings, middles, and ends. The chapters include introductory questions and responses about humankind (75:3, 5 and 76:1-2); statements to the Prophet about the Qur'an, that he should not be in haste about it and that God sends it down in stages (75:16 and 76:23); and references to the preoccupation of disbelievers for the fleeting life of this world (75:20-21 and 76:27) and to God's creation of humans and His power to create again (75:38-40 and 76:28).

Chapters 77-78

These two early Meccan chapters both refer prominently to the Day of Sorting (77:13-14, 38—besides ten refrains emphasizing the woe of that Day—and 78:17, toward the center of Chapter 78). In addition, we find in them contrasting references: on the one hand, to mountains being fixed and cool water for refreshment, and, on the other, to mountains being moved away and boiling water for drink (77:27 and 78:20, 24-25). We find in them as well similar descriptions of the rewards awaiting the pious in the Garden (77:41-44 and 78:31-36).

Chapters 79-80

These two early Meccan chapters are joined toward their middles and ends. In the chapters, we find corresponding descriptions of creation, whether of earth and heaven or of man (79:28-32 and 80:18-22), and references to provision on earth for humans and cattle and to Judgment Day's arrival (79:33-35 and 80:32-34). Also, the middle of the first chapter anticipates the beginning of the second: Moses preaches to an arrogant Pharaoh in the first location, and then the Prophet preaches to a self-satisfied Meccan in the second (79:17-25 and 80:5-7).

Chapters 81-82

These two early Meccan chapters correspond at their beginnings, middles, and ends. In these places, we encounter references to apocalyptic signs and to souls knowing what they have brought upon themselves (81:1-14 and 82:1-5); to noble angels, revelatory or recording (81:19-21 and 82:10-12); and to God's all-surpassing authority (81:29 and 82:19).

Chapters 83-84

These two early Meccan chapters are linked by the idea of reckoning. The first chapter opens by foretelling doom for those who make fraudulent transactions and believe they will not be resurrected to face Judgment (v. 4), and the second describes in the middle the punishment they will face (v. 14). In addition, verses about the records kept of the wicked (83:7-9 and 84:10-12) and the records kept of the righteous (83:18-20 and 84:7-9) correspond to each other chiastically.

Chapters 85-86

These two early Meccan chapters correspond toward their beginnings, middles, and ends. Namely, both begin with oaths on the authority of the sky and of stellar phenomena, whether the towering constellations or the bright star (85:1 and 86:1); both refer, toward their middles, to the creation anew by God on the Day of Resurrection (85:13 and 86:8); and toward their ends, both feature emphatic statements about the nature of the Qur'an (85:21-22 and 86:13-14).

Chapters 87-88

These two early Meccan chapters contain a theme in short form in the first chapter and then in elaborated form in the next. Specifically, the idea of eternal punishment for those who turn away from the message and salvation for those

who heed it, occurring toward the middle of the first chapter, is taken up and developed toward the beginning of the next (87:12-15 and 88:2-16). In addition, the two chapters correspond toward their outer ends by the instance of an imperative for the Prophet to admonish (87:9 and 88:21).

Chapters 89-90

These two early Meccan chapters feature numerous correspondences toward their beginnings, middles, and ends. At their openings, both chapters contain oaths (88:1 and 89:1), rhetorical questions (88:5-6 and 89:5, 7), and repetitions of the Arabic form for land and city (*bilad* and *balad*; 89:8, 11 and 90:1-2). Toward their centers, both chapters refer to caring for orphans and being charitable to poor (89:17-18 and 90:15-16). And at their ends, both chapters feature contrasting descriptions of ultimate punishments and rewards (89:24-30 and 90:17-20).

Chapters 91-92

These two early Meccan chapters are linked at their beginnings by strings of oaths. In particular, one notes that the oaths in 91:3-4 and 92:1-2 are mostly identical (they occur the second time with slight variation and in reverse order). Also, the reference in 91:14 to Thamud's punishment in this life corresponds to the reference in 92:14-16 to the disbelievers' punishment in the Afterlife.

Chapters 93-94

These two early Meccan chapters offer hope and encouragement to the Prophet during a time of distress. One finds in both chapters reassurance about the future and rhetorical questions about God's care previously of the Prophet (93:3-8 and 94:1-6; the order of reassurance and rhetorical questions is reversed in the second chapter), as well as closing imperatives to the Prophet (93:9-11 and 94:7-8).

Chapters 95-96

These two early Meccan chapters are linked by introductory references to the creation of man (95:4 and 96:1-2). In addition, they both emphasize that God shall return the transgressors finally to a lowly and degraded state (95:5 and 96:15-18).

Chapters 97-98

These two chapters, early Meccan and Medinan respectively, are linked by the idea of revelation: The former chapter refers to revelation by means of the Angel Gabriel to the Prophet, and the latter chapter refers to conveyance of this message by the Prophet to disbelievers among the pagans and the People of the Book (97:1-5 and 98:1-5). In addition, the first chapter of the pair indicates that this revelation includes commands, and the second elaborates on this point, stating that people are commanded to worship God exclusively, to perform regular prayers, and to give regularly to charity (97:4 and 98:5).

Chapters 99-100

These two early Meccan chapters are linked by the idea of great convulsion and the exposure of all hidden things on the Day of Resurrection. We find this theme treated in the first chapter as a whole (99:1-8), which deals with the Cataclysm and people's seeing all their former deeds, good and bad; and we find it treated at the end of the second chapter (100:9-11), which refers to the scattering of what lies in graves and the collection of what breasts enclose, and affirms that God is well-acquainted with people as to their lifetime records.

Chapters 101-102

These two early Meccan chapters are connected by the idea of knowing what punishment results from not doing good works and from loving wealth. The theme is treated at the end of the first chapter (101:8-11), which states that those with a light balance of good works will find themselves in a Pit and explains that this Pit is a Fire, and it is treated in most of the second chapter (102:3-7), which emphasizes that those loving wealth and enamored of piling it up will soon know their punishment—Hellfire.

Chapters 103-104

These two early Meccan chapters are linked by the theme of loss for sinners. The idea is stated in the second verse of the first chapter (103:2; the word here, *khusr*, connotes loss in a transaction); and it occurs in the first two verses of the next chapter, which foretell woe for the person who has gathered money and counted it (104:1-2).

Chapters 105-106

These two early Meccan chapters are joined by the idea of God's protection of Mecca and the safeguarding of Quraysh as custodians of the Ka'ba. The first chapter refers to the expedition against Mecca by Abraha from Yemen ca. 570, when God frustrated his expedition by sending birds against his army (the birds pelted the men with stones), and the second chapter refers to God's safeguarding the tribe of Quraysh (as the inhabitants of Mecca and custodians of its religious site) and ensuring their caravans' safe travel in winter and summer. By the end of the pair (106:3-4), there becomes apparent furthermore a causal link between the chapters: As a result of God's protection, these inhabitants of Mecca should worship God, the Lord of its House of Worship.

Chapters 107-108

These two early Meccan chapters are linked by themes of prayer and charity. The first chapter foretells woe for those who pray openly—so as to be seen—but withhold small kindnesses from orphans and destitute persons, while the second chapter points to the abundance God grants to people and instructs man to pray (giving thanks) and offer sacrifice (which has the effect of benefitting the poor, for the slaughtered meat feeds them).

Chapters 109-110

These two chapters, early Meccan and Medinan respectively, are linked by stark contrast between the believers and the disbelievers. The first chapter differentiates the religion of the Prophet from that of the pagans, and the second chapter emphasizes that God helps and gives victory to the believers. This latter chapter, revealed on the occasion of the farewell pilgrimage, when crowds of people were joining the new religion, points to the ultimate triumph of Islam over the pagan ways.²

Chapters 111-112

These two early Meccan chapters are linked by stark contrast between polytheism and monotheism. The first chapter refers to the fate of Abu Lahab and his wife. Abu Lahab's real name was 'Abd al-'Uzza, or "Servant of al-'Uzza," 'Uzza being one of the goddesses worshipped at Mecca besides God. Abu Lahab was wealthy and staunchly opposed the Prophet, leading the city against him. He represented the pagan cult, and the chapter affirms that he and his wife (who worshipped other gods too) shall end up in Hell. The second

chapter, in pointed contrast, contains a concise statement of monotheism. It emphasizes that God has no children and was never born; He is everlasting and without equal.

Chapters 113-114

Discussed in our third chapter above.

Appendix C

Chapter Groups

Below we indicate the manner in which the groups of chapters hold together. The structural and thematic elements we highlight in this appendix mark the sequences of chapters as unified, discrete groups within the Qur'an. It should be mentioned that other links within the groups, no doubt, exist. We point here only to some of the more prominent elements that have the effect of marking off and giving cohesion to the individual groups.

Chapters 2-5

Discussed in our fifth chapter above.

Chapters 6-9

These chapters have been previously recognized as a group by Amin Islahi.¹ The group contains two pairs: Chapters 6-7 and 8-9. The first pair, from the late Meccan period, warns the disbelievers of the city of Mecca; it concerns the Quraysh, the tribe inhabiting Mecca, and their custodianship of the Ka‘ba, including their practice there of sacrificing livestock to idols (6:136). The second pair, from the Medinan period, affirms that disbelievers are not the true guardians of the Ka‘ba (8:34) and that believers rather are the ones to tend it (9:17-22). In addition, the first pair cites examples of earlier prophets, among them Abraham, Noah, Hud, Salih, Lot, and Shu‘ayb of the people of Midian. The last chapter of the group then recalls Noah, Hud, Salih, Abraham, the people of Midian, and Lot (v. 70). This return in Chapter 9 further connects the two pairs and provides closure at the end of the group.

Chapters 10-15

Discussed in our fifth chapter above.

Chapters 16-21

This group consists of three pairs from the middle and late Meccan period, including a first pair, a middle pair, and a last pair: 16-17, 18-19, and 20-21. Collectively, these chapters deal with the theme of revelation. Thus, Chapter 16 mentions revelation toward the beginning as descending upon the servants whom God chooses (v. 2) and toward the end as descending upon Muhammad (v. 123). Also, the central verse (v. 64) states that God sent the Scripture to Muhammad as a guide and a mercy to those who believe. Moreover verse 68, pointing to nature, indicates that God inspired the bee, the creature after which the chapter is named.² Next, Chapter 17, *The Night Journey*, begins with a reference to the Prophet's revelatory experience of travel to Jerusalem and thence to Heaven. Toward the middle of the chapter, in verse 60, there is another apparent reference to the Prophet's journey and the vision that was vouchsafed to him then.

Chapter 18, *The Cave*, begins and ends with references to revelation. Also, as Abdel Haleem has noted, "the Qur'anic view of prophets is summed up in Q. 18:56; *We only send messengers to bring good news and deliver warning.*"³ This central verse plainly states the purpose of revelation. The following chapter, *Mary*, reports occasions of first revelation to Zachariah, John the Baptist, and Mary.

Chapter 20, *Ta Ha*, affirms at the beginning (v. 2) that the Qur'an has not been revealed as a cause for distress. It then recalls the story of Moses' inspiration. At the center of the chapter (vv. 67-68), the text says that God comforted Moses on an occasion when he took fright. Chapter 21, *The Prophets*, concludes the group. Toward the beginning and end, it speaks of revelation to earlier prophets and to Muhammad (7, 108; cf. 16:2, 123).

In addition, we find other links between the chapters involving particular prophets. Abraham is mentioned in Chapters 16 and 21, and Moses is mentioned in Chapters 17 and 20 (both prophets are also referred to in the middle pair, Chapters 18 and 19). Likewise, Abraham is identified as a monotheistic "community" (*umma*) in 16:120 and then is included with the prophets of "one community" in 21:92, while Moses is mentioned immediately after the initial reference to the Prophet's Night Journey in Chapter 17 and then is commanded to travel by night with the Children of Israel in 20:77.⁴ These links further tie the outer pairs together and contribute to centering Chapters 18-19 within the group.

Chapters 22-24

This group, dating from the middle Meccan and Medinan revelatory periods (Chapter 23, *The Believers*, is the sole Meccan chapter in the group), contains one pair and a supplementary chapter. The supplemental chapter, *Light*, is connected to the preceding pair—specifically, to the first chapter of the pair, *The Pilgrimage*—in prominent ways. Central verses in Chapter 24 about God’s light shining in houses of worship (vv. 36-37) recall central verses from Chapter 22 referring to places of worship wherein God’s name is mentioned often (vv. 40-41). Moreover, legislation on entering houses and eating in them (24:27-29, 61) bears a semantic relation to injunctions about pilgrimage to the Sacred House in Mecca and animal sacrifice on this occasion (22:26-37).

Chapters 25-32

This group from the middle and late Meccan period consists of four pairs: 25-26, 27-28, 29-30, and 31-32. With the exception of Chapter 25, these chapters begin with letters (TSM or TS, or ALM). As a whole, the group contains an initial pair, two middle pairs linked by parallelism (27 and 29 are named after small creatures, having the names of *The Ants* and *The Spider*, respectively, while 28 and 30 refer conspicuously to God’s Face, as indicated below), and a final pair. This group deals prominently with the theme of prostration. Accordingly, we find the contrast at the ends between those who refuse to bow down to the Merciful (25:60) and those who fall in prostration when God’s verses are recited to them (32:15; the thirty-second chapter, it may be noted, is named *Prostration*), and prominent reference to God’s Face—being the symbolic orientation of the worshipper—in the middle (28:88, the concluding verse of this chapter, and twice in 30:37-38). In addition, the repeat in 32:23 of the statement that God formerly brought Moses the Scripture (cf. 25:35) further binds the group together.

Chapters 33-39

This group includes an introductory chapter, *The Combined Forces*, revealed after the Muslims’ withstanding of siege by a large Meccan army at the Battle of the Trench (5/627), which signaled an end to the polytheists’ dominance in Arabia, and six middle and late Meccan chapters emphasizing praise. The latter chapters are composed of a first pair, a middle pair, and a last pair (34-35, 36-37, and 38-39).

The introductory chapter, as indicated, refers to the Battle of the Trench and the various forces arranged on that occasion against the Muslims. The chapter is connected to the first pair by reference in 33:9 to the great wind that God sent to defeat the disbelievers (cf. 35:9, and also the reference to Solomon, to whom God gave the power to control the wind, in 34:12). In this introductory chapter as well, the Prophet is cited as an excellent model for the believers. Next, both chapters of the first pair open with statements of praise. The middle pair then features glorification of God Who has created pairs (36:36) and quotes the arranged angels—after whom the second middle chapter is named—declaring God’s glory (37:166). In the last pair, there is a return to the mention of Solomon and his control of the wind (38:36) and to the identification of the Prophet as a model, first of those who submit (39:12; cf. 33:21). The group ends with the angels’ repeat of praise to God, Lord of all peoples (cf. 34:1 and 35:1).

Chapters 40-46

These middle and late Meccan chapters have been identified as a group in the classical period by scholars such as al-Zarkashi and al-Suyuti and in the modern era by Yusuf ‘Ali and Islam Dayeh.⁵ They are linked by the initial letters HM. The group includes an opening pair, a central chapter, and two closing pairs: 40-41, 42, and 43-44 and 45-46.

The opening chapter, at the outset, emphasizes God’s forgiveness and cites angels beseeching it for believers through prayer (vv. 3 and 7; the chapter is entitled *The Forgiver* after v. 3). Later, a central verse of the middle chapter affirms that God is the One Who accepts repentance from His servants (42:25). In one of the last chapters, we find a return to the theme of forgiveness in the instruction to the Prophet to tell believers to forgive those who do not fear the battle-days of God (45:14). In addition, the reference in 44:10 to the smoke on Judgment Day (after which Chapter 44 takes its name) recalls the reference in 41:11 to the smoke at creation; and the mention of jinn in 46:18, 29 points back to the mention of jinn in 41:25, 29. These numerous references, from the last two pairs back to the opening pair, serve to close the group.

Chapters 47-49

These three Medinan chapters have been recognized as a group by Yusuf ‘Ali.⁶ They consist of one pair and a supplementary chapter. The supplementary chapter, *The Inner Rooms*, revealed during the Year of Deputations (9/631),

relates to the initial pair integrally. It continues to deal with the theme of fighting (Chapter 47, revealed before the Battle of Badr, calls on the believers to smite the disbelievers). Here the Muslims are exhorted to come together and are warned against internal strife; they are instructed to combat one party when it transgresses against another (49:9). Moreover, the last verse of Chapter 49 recalls the opening of Chapter 47 by the warning about people's deeds (cf. 47:1, 4, 8-9).

Chapters 50-56

Discussed in our sixth chapter above.

Chapters 57-66

These ten Medinan chapters have been identified as a group by Yusuf 'Ali.⁷ They consist of an opening chapter and pair, a middle chapter and pair, and two closing pairs: 57, 58-59; 60, 61-62; and 63-64 and 65-66. Thematically, the chapters deal prominently with the theme of military fighting and with domestic relations. Regarding the first theme, one finds that the first chapter of the group has the name *Iron*, a material used in war (v. 25), and that the last chapter instructs the Prophet to strive hard against the unbelievers and the hypocrites (66:9). A middle chapter, meanwhile, urges the believers to fight together like a solid structure (61:4). Regarding domestic relations, the second chapter concerns divorce (58:1-4), the second-to-last chapter is named *Divorce*, and a middle chapter deals with the subject of women switching sides between believers and disbelievers (60:10-11). In addition, one notices a similar opening instruction or statement about praising God in beginning, middle, and ending chapters: in 57:1 and 59:1; in 61:1 and 62:1; and in 64:1. Also, references to Mary (whether to herself or to her role as the mother of Jesus) occurring in 57:27, 61:6, and 66:12—again, at the ends and the middle of the group—further mark these chapters as a discrete group.

Chapters 67-72

These early and middle Meccan chapters are connected by the theme of sight, especially with respect to Judgment, and include an opening pair, a middle pair, and a closing pair: 67-68, 69-70, and 71-72. Chapter 67 introduces the theme of sight in verses 3-4, telling humankind to look at God's creation. At the end of the chapter, in verses 28 and 30, the question twice occurs, *Do you see?* with

regard first to the torment awaiting disbelievers and then to God's being the source of life. Chapter 68, also of the first pair, affirms that on Judgment Day the sinners' eyes will be cast down in ignominy (v. 43). In the last pair, specifically, in one of the closing verses (72:24), there is a reference to the disbelievers seeing what they have been promised (cf. 67:28). Examining the middle chapters, moreover, we find a question as to whether humankind sees any survivors of Thamud and 'Ad, peoples destroyed for their sin (69:8), and statements that the disbelievers view Judgment Day as distant, whereas believers view it as close (70:6-7).

Also, these chapters are further linked thematically and structurally by references to jinn (who, it will be remembered, belong to the world of the unseen; one may alternatively consider these chapters to be bound together by the opposition of the seen and the unseen). The last chapter of the group, named *The Jinn*, quotes an assembly of these beings. The jinn speak of unsuccessful attempts to discover the secrets of Heaven (72:8-9)—information that recalls the statement in 67:5 about the heavens being protected from intrusion by demons, or jinn. Likewise, the second-to-last chapter features a telling of the story of Noah (significantly in this context, he was a prophet accused of being possessed by jinn), a story that recalls the oath at the opening of the second chapter that the Prophet is not possessed by jinn (68:1-2).⁸ And in one of the middle chapters, we find a solemn oath (made on the authority of what is seen and what is not seen) that the Prophet's message is not the speech of a poet or a soothsayer (69:38-42). It will be noted that both poets and soothsayers were inspired by, or got their information from, jinn.⁹

Chapters 73-80

These eight chapters belong to the early and middle Meccan period of revelation. They include an opening pair, two middle pairs, and a closing pair: 73-74, 75-76 and 77-78, and 79-80. This group, like most of the groups, has a concentric arrangement. Thus, the opening pair and closing pair are connected, here by references to the story of Moses (73:15-16; 79:15-26) and to frowning and turning away (74:22-23; 79:22 and 80:1). Proceeding inward, we see that inner pairs are related at their ends by references to Resurrection and to standing forth at Judgment (75:1; 78:38). At the core, the inner pairs detail rewards and punishments in the Hereafter, Chapter 76 focusing on what awaits believers and Chapter 77 focusing on what awaits disbelievers.

Group 81-88

These eight early Meccan chapters emphasize the looming of Judgment and the veracity of revelation. The group consists of two opening pairs, a middle pair, and a closing pair: 81-82 and 83-84, 85-86, and 87-88. The two opening pairs themselves are concentrically arranged. Hence, one finds the outer chapters of the opening pairs linked by similar oaths (on the authority of the planets, night and dawn in 81:15-18 and on the authority of the sunset, night and moon in 84:16-18) and the inner chapters linked by references to rejection of Judgment Day and a written record of deeds (82:9-11 and 83:9-11). The last pair of the group then points back to the first pair by reference in 88:17 to the creation of camels, as evidence of God's capacity to bring back to life (cf. 81:4). And in the middle pair, at the conclusion of the first chapter, we find an emphatic statement about the glorious, uncorrupt nature of the Qur'an (85:21-22).

Chapters 89-92

These four early Meccan chapters, all beginning with oaths, have been identified as a group by Michel Cuypers.¹⁰ They consist of two pairs, 89-90 and 91-92, linked by means of parallelism. Accordingly, we find the doomed people of Thamud referred to in 89:9 and then cited more expansively in 91:11-15 (cf. also the similarity in opening oaths, on the authority of daybreak in 89:1 and on the authority of the sun and its brightness in 91:1). Likewise, we notice the two main ways mentioned in 90:10 and then illuminated in more detail in 92:4-10.

Chapters 93-98

These six chapters—the first five early Meccan and the last Medinan—have been identified as a group by Cuypers.¹¹ They deal collectively with the idea of revelation, especially its onset, and consist of an opening pair, a middle pair, and a closing pair: 93-94, 95-96, and 97-98. The first pair encourages the Prophet during a difficult time, apparently after a lapse in inspiration (see 93:3). The last pair then features a chapter about the first night of revelation (97), the Night of Power. And in the middle pair, we find the first five verses that were revealed to the Prophet (96:1-5). Also, the return to the promise of contentment in the Lord's presence at the end of Chapter 98 (v. 8; cf. 93:5) further binds the chapters together.

Chapters 99-104

These six early Meccan chapters have been recognized as a group by Cuypers.¹² They consist of two pairs linked by parallelism, 99-100 and 101-102, and a supplemental pair, 103-104. Thus, we find both Chapters 99 and 101 describing Judgment as a Day of tremendous convulsion and clamor, and both Chapters 100 and 102 highlighting humankind's love of wealth and referring to graves (100:9 and 102:2). The supplemental pair, connected to the first four chapters by theme, announces that humankind indeed is in a state of great loss (cf. 100 and 102), and that the person who piles up wealth, thinking it will make him or her last forever, will be thrown on that Day into the Crusher (cf. 99 and 101).

Chapters 105-108

These four early Meccan chapters, including the pairs 105-106 and 107-108, have been recognized as a group by Cuypers.¹³ They cohere by parallelism. Accordingly, we notice that both Chapters 105 and 107 open with questions involving sight, and that both Chapters 106 and 108 contain imperatives in central verses, whether to worship the Lord or to turn to Him in prayer and offer sacrifice to Him (106:3; 108:2).

Chapters 109-112

Discussed in our fifth chapter above.

Reading Group Guide

A. There are twenty-five prophets mentioned in the Qur'an, Muhammad being the twenty-fifth. Using the index below, compare their messages with his, taking into account the approximate time of revelation (index based on Nöldeke's chronology; see table further below).

Other Prophets Mentioned in the Qur'an

Adam	Middle Meccan	20:117-23
	Late Meccan	7:19-25
	Medinan	2:30-39; 5:27-31
Enoch	Middle Meccan	19:56-57; 21:85
Noah	Early Meccan	69:11-12; 51:46
	Middle Meccan	71:1-28; 54:9-15; 37:75-82; 26:105-122; 23:23-30; 21:76-77; 25:37
	Late Meccan	11:25-49; 29:14-15; 10:71-73; 7:59-64; 6:84
	Medinan	4:163
Hud	Middle Meccan	26:123-40
	Late Meccan	11:50-60; 7:65-72; 46:21-26

Salih	Middle Meccan Late Meccan	26:141-59; 27:45-53 11:61-68; 7:73-79
Abraham	Early Meccan	87:19; 53:37; 51:24-30
	Middle Meccan	37:83-111; 26:69-87; 15:51-56; 19:41-50; 21:51-71
	Late Meccan	16:120-23; 11:69-76; 14:35-41; 29:16-18, 24-25; 6:74-83
	Medinan	2:124-32, 135-36, 258, 260; 3:67, 84, 95-97; 4:163; 60:4-6; 9:113-14
Ishmael	Middle Meccan	19:54-55; 21:85
	Late Meccan	6:86
	Medinan	2:125-29, 136; 3:84; 4:163
Isaac	Middle Meccan	37:112-13; 38:45-47; 21:72
	Late Meccan	6:84
	Medinan	2:136; 3:84; 4:163
Lot	Early Meccan	51:31-37
	Middle Meccan	54:33-39; 37:133-38; 15:57-77; 26:160-75; 21:74-75; 27:54-58
	Late Meccan	11:77-83; 29:26, 28-35; 7:80-84; 6:86
	Medinan	66:10
Jacob	Middle Meccan	19:49; 38:45-47; 21:72
	Late Meccan	12:4-18, 63-100; 6:84
	Medinan	2:132-33, 136; 3:84; 4:163
Joseph	Late Meccan	12:4-101; 6:84

Shu'ayb	Late Meccan	11:84-95; 29:36-37; 7:85-93
Job	Middle Meccan	38:41-44; 21:83-84
	Late Meccan	6:84
	Medinan	4:163
Moses	Early Meccan	87:19; 53:36; 79:15-26; 51:38-40
	Middle Meccan	37:114-22; 20:9-98; 26:10-66; 19:51-53; 43:46-56; 23:45-49; 25:35-36; 17:101-103; 27:7-14; 18:60-82
	Late Meccan	11:96-99, 110; 14:5-8; 40:23-46; 28:3-43; 10:75-92; 7:103-162; 6:84
Aaron	Medinan	2:51-61, 136; 3:84; 61:5; 5:20-26
	Middle Meccan	20:29-36, 90-94
	Late Meccan	6:84
David	Medinan	4:163
	Middle Meccan	38:48; 21:85
	Late Meccan	38:17-26; 21:78-80; 27:15-16
Solomon	Medinan	34:10-11; 6:84 2:251; 4:163
	Middle Meccan	38:30-40; 21:78-82; 27:15-44
	Late Meccan	34:12-14; 6:84
Elias (Elijah)	Medinan	2:102; 4:163
	Middle Meccan	37:123-32
Elisha	Late Meccan	6:85
	Middle Meccan	38:48
	Late Meccan	6:86

Jonah	Early Meccan Middle Meccan Late Meccan Medinan	68:48-50 37:139-48; 21:87-88 10:98; 6:86 4:163
Zachariah	Middle Meccan Late Meccan Medinan	19:2-11; 21:89-90 6:85 3:37-41
John	Middle Meccan Late Meccan Medinan	19:12-15; 21:90 6:85 3:39
Jesus	Middle Meccan Late Meccan Medinan	19:22-33; 43:57-64; 23:50 6:85 2:136; 3:45-62, 84; 61:6, 14; 57:27; 4:157-59, 163, 171-72; 9:30; 5:17, 46, 72, 75, 110-18

References to Other Prophets According to Period of Revelation

Early Meccan	Noah, Abraham, Lot, Moses, Jonah
Middle Meccan	Adam, Enoch, Noah, Hud, Salih, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Lot, Jacob, Job, Moses, Aaron, Ezekiel, David, Solomon, Elias, Elisha, Jonah, Zachariah, John, Jesus
Late Meccan	Adam, Noah, Hud, Salih, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Lot, Jacob, Joseph, Shu'ayb, Job, Moses, Aaron, David, Solomon, Elias, Elisha, Jonah, Zachariah, John, Jesus
Medinan	Adam, Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Lot, Jacob, Job, Moses, Aaron, David, Solomon, Jonah, Zachariah, John, Jesus

Approximate Sequence of Revelation (Per Nöldeke)

EARLY MECCAN PHASE

Nöldeke Chronology	Egyptian Chronology	Chapter Name	Initial Letters	Number	Length (Verses)
N1	E1	<i>The Clot</i>		96	19
N2	E4	<i>Enveloped</i>		74	56
N3	E6	<i>Perish</i>		111	5
N4	E29	<i>Quraysh</i>		106	4
N5	E15	<i>Abundance</i>		108	3
N6	E32	<i>The Backbiter</i>		104	9
N7	E17	<i>Small Kindnesses</i>		107	7
N8	E16	<i>Piling Up Wealth</i>		102	8
N9	E19	<i>The Elephant</i>		105	5
N10	E9	<i>The Night</i>		92	21
N11	E35	<i>The City</i>		90	20
N12	E12	<i>Relief</i>		94	8
N13	E11	<i>The Morning Brightness</i>		93	11
N14	E25	<i>The Night of Power</i>		97	5
N15	E36	<i>The Night Visitor</i>		86	17
N16	E26	<i>The Sun</i>		91	15
N17	E24	<i>He Frowned</i>		80	42
N18	E2	<i>The Pen</i>	N	68	52
N19	E8	<i>The Most High</i>		87	19
N20	E28	<i>The Fig</i>		95	8
N21	E13	<i>The Time</i>		103	3

N22	E27	<i>The Constellations</i>	85	22
N23	E3	<i>Enwrapped</i>	73	20
N24	E30	<i>The Day of Noise</i> <i>and Concussion</i>	101	11
N25	E93	<i>The Earthquake</i>	99	8
N26	E82	<i>The Cleaving Asunder</i>	82	19
N27	E7	<i>The Folding Up</i>	81	29
N28	E23	<i>The Star</i>	53	62
N29	E83	<i>The Rending</i>	84	25
N30	E14	<i>The Charging Stallions</i>	100	11
N31	E81	<i>The Striving Coursers</i>	79	46
N32	E33	<i>The Ones Unleashed</i>	77	50
N33	E80	<i>The Mighty Tiding</i>	78	40
N34	E68	<i>The Covering Darkness</i>	88	26
N35	E10	<i>The Dawn</i>	89	30
N36	E31	<i>The Resurrection</i>	75	40
N37	E86	<i>The Shortchangers</i>	83	36
N38	E78	<i>The Hour of Truth</i>	69	52
N39	E67	<i>The Raisers of Dust</i>	51	60
N40	E76	<i>The Mountain</i>	52	49
N41	E46	<i>The Event</i>	56	96
N42	E79	<i>The Ways of Ascent</i>	70	44
N43	E97	<i>The Merciful</i>	55	78
N44	E22	<i>Oneness</i>	112	4
N45	E18	<i>The Disbelievers</i>	109	6
N46	E20	<i>The Daybreak</i>	113	5
N47	E21	<i>People</i>	114	6
N48	E5	<i>The Opening</i>	1	6

MIDDLE MECCAN PHASE

Nöldeke Chronology	Egyptian Chronology	Chapter Name	Initial Letters	Number	Length (Verses)
N49	E37	<i>The Moon</i>		54	55
N50	E56	<i>The Ones in Ranks</i>		37	182
N51	E71	<i>Noah</i>		71	28
N52	E98	<i>Span of Time</i>		76	31
N53	E64	<i>Smoke</i>		44	59
N54	E34	<i>Qaf</i>	Q	50	45
N55	E45	<i>Ta Ha</i>	TH	20	135
N56	E47	<i>The Poets</i>	TSM	26	227
N57	E54	<i>Al-Hijr</i>	ALR	15	99
N58	E44	<i>Mary</i>	KHY'S	19	98
N59	E38	<i>Sad</i>	S	38	88
N60	E41	<i>Ya Sin</i>	YS	36	83
N61	E63	<i>Ornaments of Gold</i>	HM	43	89
N62	E40	<i>The Jinn</i>		72	28
N63	E77	<i>Sovereignty</i>		67	30
N64	E74	<i>The Believers</i>		23	118
N65	E73	<i>The Prophets</i>		21	112
N66	E42	<i>The Differentiator</i>		25	77
N67	E50	<i>The Night Journey</i>		17	111
N68	E48	<i>The Ant</i>	TS	27	93
N69	E69	<i>The Cave</i>		18	110

LATE MECCAN PHASE

Nöldeke Chronology	Egyptian Chronology	Chapter Name	Initial	Number Letters	Length (Verses)
N70	E75	<i>Prostration</i>	ALM	32	30
N71	E61	<i>Signs Made Clear</i>	HM	41	54
N72	E65	<i>Bowing the Knee</i>	HM	45	37
N73	E70	<i>The Bee</i>		16	128
N74	E84	<i>The Greeks</i>	ALM	30	60
N75	E52	<i>Hud</i>	ALR	11	123
N76	E72	<i>Abraham</i>	ALR	14	52
N77	E53	<i>Joseph</i>	ALR	12	111
N78	E60	<i>The Forgiver</i>	HM	40	85
N79	E49	<i>The Story</i>	TSM	28	88
N80	E59	<i>The Groups</i>		39	75
N81	E85	<i>The Spider</i>	ALM	29	69
N82	E57	<i>Luqman</i>	ALM	31	34
N83	E62	<i>Counsel</i>	HM'SQ	42	53
N84	E51	<i>Jonah</i>	ALR	10	109
N85	E58	<i>Sheba</i>		34	54
N86	E43	<i>The Angels</i>		35	45
N87	E39	<i>The Heights</i>	ALMS	7	206
N88	E66	<i>The Sand Dunes</i>	HM	46	35
N89	E55	<i>Livestock</i>		6	165
N90	E96	<i>Thunder</i>	ALMR	13	43

MEDINAN PHASE

Nöldeke Chronology	Egyptian Chronology	Chapter Name	Initial Number	Number Letters	Length (Verses)
N91	E87	<i>The Cow</i>	ALM 2		286
N92	E100	<i>Manifest Evidence</i>	98		8
N93	E108	<i>Mutual Loss and Gain</i>	64		18
N94	E110	<i>Congregation</i>	62		11
N95	E88	<i>The Spoils</i>	8		75
N96	E95	<i>Muhammad</i>	47		38
N97	E89	<i>The Family of Imran</i>	ALM 3		200
N98	E109	<i>The Battle-Line</i>	61		14
N99	E94	<i>Iron</i>	57		29
N100	E92	<i>Women</i>	4		176
N101	E99	<i>Divorce</i>	65		12
N102	E101	<i>The Gathering</i>	59		24
N103	E90	<i>The Combined Forces</i>	33		73
N104	E104	<i>The Hypocrites</i>	63		11
N105	E102	<i>Light</i>	24		64
N106	E105	<i>The Dispute</i>	58		22
N107	E103	<i>The Pilgrimage</i>	22		78
N108	E111	<i>Victory</i>	48		29
N109	E107	<i>Prohibition</i>	66		12
N110	E91	<i>The Woman Tested</i>	60		13
N111	E114	<i>Help</i>	110		3
N112	E106	<i>The Inner Rooms</i>	49		18
N113	E113	<i>Repentance</i>	9		129
N114	E112	<i>The Table</i>	5		120

B. Take one of the chapter groups discussed in [Appendix C](#) (for example, Chapters 73-80 from the early and middle Meccan periods, or Chapters 57-66 from the Medinan period). Study the chapters first individually, then as pairs, then as a group. Discuss whether the chapters constitute unities, form pairs, and cohere as a group.

Notes

Introduction

1. The work by al-Jahiz, *Nazm al-Qur'an*, has unfortunately been lost. Al-Nisaburi's quote is found in al-Zarkashi (d. 794/ 1391), *Al-Burhan fi 'ulum al-Qur'an* [*The Proof Regarding Qur'anic Sciences*], ed. Abu al-Fadl al-Dimyati (Cairo: Dar al-Hadith, 2006) 37.
2. Mustansir Mir, "The Sura as a Unity: A Twentieth century development in Qur'an exegesis," *The Koran: Critical Concepts in Islamic Studies*, ed. Colin Turner, vol. 4 (London: Routledge, 2004) 199; Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975) 199.
3. The titles by Ibn al-Zubayr and al-Suyuti are, respectively, *The Proof of the Interconnection of the Qur'anic Chapters* and *The Secrets of the Arrangement of the Qur'an*. Abu Bakr ibn al-'Arabi's statement is cited in al-Zarkashi 37. Compare al-Zarkashi's remark two pages later: "Upon contemplation, it becomes evident that the entire Qur'an holds together like a single word."
4. Ibn 'Aqila (d. 1150/1737), *Al-Ziyada wa-al-ihsan fi 'ulum al-Qur'an* [*The Enhancement and Embellishment of the Qur'anic Sciences*], vol. 6 (Sharjah: Markaz al-buhuth wa-al-dirasat fi Jami‘at Sharjah, 2006) 299; cf. al-Zarkashi 37.
5. Graham and Kermani, "Recitation and aesthetic reception," *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, ed. Jane McAuliffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 133; Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. J. Shawcross, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962) 239.
6. Voltaire, "Alcoran" in *Dictionnaire de philosophie*, cited in Michel Cuypers and Geneviève Gobillot, *Le Coran* (Paris: Le Cavalier Bleu, 2007) 47; Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, ed. Archibald MacMechan (Boston: Athenaeum, 1901) 74; Nöldeke and Schwally's opinion as cited in Kermani, "The Aesthetic Reception of the Qur'an as Reflected in Early Muslim History," *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an*, ed. Issa J. Boullata (London: Routledge, 2000) 255; Hirschfeld, *New Researches into the Composition and Exegesis of the Quran* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1902) 5; Bell, *The Qur'an: Translated, with a critical re-arrangement of the Surahs* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1937) vi; Peters, "The Poet in Performance: The Composition of the Qur'an," *Sacred Books of the Three Faiths: Judaism, Christianity, Islam*, ed. John Reeve (London: British Library, 2007) 26, 28.
7. Kermani, "Aesthetic Reception" 258, 261-62.
8. All references here are to the 1924 Egyptian Standard Edition. For the various slight deviations from this edition in the numbering of verses, see Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text*, 2nd ed. (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2003) 288-91.
9. Carlyle 74; Rodwell, *The Qur'an*, 1861 trans., Everyman Library ed. (London: J. M. Dent, 1909); Bell, 1937 trans.; Blachère, *Le Coran: Traduction nouvelle* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1949); Starkovsky, *The Koran Handbook: An Annotated Translation* (New York: Algora, 2005). On the reaction by Western scholars to classical Arabic poetry, see Raymond Farrin, *Abundance from the Desert: Classical Arabic Poetry* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011) xiii-xviii, 26.
10. Cuypers identifies these three forms in *The Banquet: A Reading of the Fifth Sura of the Qur'an* (Miami: Convivium 2009) 35; cf. Roland Meynet, *Rhetorical Analysis: An Introduction to Biblical Rhetoric* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) 199. See also Cuypers' recent excellent study in

- French, *La composition du Coran: Nazm al-Qur'an* (Pendé: Gabalda, 2012).
11. Islahi's ideas about chapter pairs and chapter groups are discussed in Mustansir Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'an: A Study of Islahi's Concept of Nazm in Tadubbur-i Qur'an* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1986) 75-98. For Cuypers, see his articles, "Structures rhétoriques des sourates 105 à 114," *Mélanges de l'Institut Dominicain d'Études Orientales (MIDEO)* 23 (1997): 157-96; "Structures rhétoriques des sourates 99 à 104," *Annales Islamologiques* 33 (1999): 31-62; "Structures rhétoriques des sourates 92 à 98," *Annales Islamologiques* 34 (2000): 95-128; "Structures rhétoriques des sourates 85 à 90," *Annales Islamologiques* 35 (2001): 27-99; "La composition rhétorique des sourates 81 à 84," *Annales Islamologiques* 37 (2003): 91-136.
 12. Douglas, *Thinking in Circles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007) 16, 33-38. Douglas herself draws on the work of Nils Lund. See Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament: A Study in Formgeschichte* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1942) 40-41.

Chapter One

1. Cf. al-Qurtubi, *Tafsir [Al-Qurtubi's Commentary]*, ed. Salim Mustafa al-Badri, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2004) 82; Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an* 38, 77.
2. Al-Jahiz as cited in al-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fi 'ulum al-Qur'an [The Improvement in the Qur'anic Sciences]*, ed. Fawwaz Ahmad Zumarli (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, 2005) 135.
On the fundamental difference of the Qur'an as it was first perceived, note this remark made by a healer upon his arrival in Mecca: "I have heard already many words of sorcerers, fortunetellers and poets, but never something like this." Cf. the reaction by the poet Walid ibn Mughira: "I know many Qasides and *rajaz* verses, and am even familiar with the poems of the Jinnee. But, by God, his recitation is like none of them." Quoted in Kermani, "Aesthetic Reception" 259; and "Poetry and Language," *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006) 109.
3. Al-Zamakhshari (d. 538/1144), *Al-Kashshaf [The Unveiling Commentary]*, ed. Muhammad 'Abd al-Salam Shahin, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2006) 11.
4. Al-Tabari (d. 310/923), *Tafsir [Al-Tabari's Commentary]*, ed. Salah al-Khalidi, vol. 1 (Damascus: Dar al-Qalam, 1997) 72; Abu Hayyan, *Tafsir al-bahr al-muhit [The Enveloping Sea Commentary]*, ed. 'Adil 'Abd al-Mawjud and 'Ali Mu'awwad, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2007) 130; "'alam" in Ibn Manzur (d. 711/1312) *Lisan al-'Arab [The Mother Tongue of the Arabs]*, vol. 4 (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1997) 417; Ibn Kathir (d. 774/1373), *Tafsir [Ibn Kathir's Commentary]*, ed. Muhammad al-Albani, vol. 1 (Cairo: Maktabat al-Safa, 2004) 37.

Of course, the Qur'an also states that God is the "Lord of the heavens and the earth" (e.g., 13:16) and the "Lord of all things" (6:164). Yet we would argue that a specific meaning is intended in 1:1, as in 114:1, where God is described as the "Lord of people," i.e., of humans and jinn.

The rest of God's creation, as mentioned above, contrastingly celebrates God at all times; it is not in need of the Qur'an, nor will it be judged. We have here the sense of nature, to quote Kenneth Cragg, "as itself an awesome reverence perpetually offered to the power beyond itself" (*The Event of the Qur'an: Islam in Its Scripture* [Oxford: Oneworld, 1994] 94). In keeping with nature, humankind and jinn are meant to pay tribute (cf. 51:56).

5. For more on the jinn, see Amira El-Zein, *Islam, Arabs, and the Intelligent World of the Jinn* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009). See also Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009) 121-31.
6. T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, "Little Gidding" 216.
7. Al-Qurtubi 1:98; al-Razi, *Mafatih al-ghayb [The Keys to What is Hidden]*, ed. 'Imad al-Barudi, vol. 1 (Cairo: Al-Maktaba al-Tawfiqiyya, 2003) 222-23.
8. See, for example, al-Tabari 1:75-76, al-Zamakhshari 1:22, Ibn Kathir 1:37.
9. Cf. the observation by Walid Saleh: "The Qur'an weaves a matrix of words around the concept of

journeying, guidance, path, and destination. It speaks of finding one's way, of getting lost, of roaming the earth, of straight paths and crooked paths (Q 7:86); it speaks of lurking near highways to ambush; it speaks of stampeding on a highway; it speaks of darkness lit by lightning through which one attempts to walk, only to halt again as the skies darken, thus recreating day and night in an instant, guidance and bewilderment in the flash of a moment, while the believers have their light guiding them on the way. [. . .] Indeed the vocabulary is so rich and so varied, the imagery so complex and adroit that one has to take this imagery as fundamental in the message of the Qur'an as to how it understands guidance, and hence salvation." "The Etymological Fallacy and Qur'anic Studies: Muhammad, Paradise, and Late Antiquity," *The Qur'an in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'anic Milieu*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2010) 666.

10. See Farrin, *Abundance from the Desert* 82.
11. Mir, *Understanding the Islamic Scripture: A Study of Selected Passages from the Qur'an* (New York: Pearson, 2008) 15.
12. It also links them grammatically: the first sentence being nominal (beginning with a noun), the last, verbal (beginning with an imperative), and the two phrases of verse 4 both beginning with a pronominal form ("You alone") and ending with a verb ("worship," "ask for aid"). Mir, "Contrapuntal Harmony in the Thought, Mood, and Structure of Surat al-Fatiha," *Renaissance* 9 (1999): 1-2.
13. Al-Biqa'i, *Nazm al-durar [The Arrangement of Pearls]*, ed. 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Mahdi, vol. 8 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2006) 617.

Chapter Two

1. The occurrence of letters at the beginning of various chapters of the Qur'an will be discussed below, in our fifth chapter.
2. Al-Zarkashi 38.
3. About this feature just mentioned, cf. Nils Lund from *Chiasmus in the New Testament*: "There are also many instances of ideas, occurring at the centre of one system and recurring in the extremes of a corresponding system, the second system evidently having been constructed to match the first." *Chiasmus in the New Testament: A Study in Formgeschichte* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1942) 41.
4. Al-Zamakhshari 1:109.
5. Later, Rahman adds that, in a sense, "Satan is nothing but a force that strengthens the evil tendencies innate in man. [. . .] If he is to negate this powerful alliance, it becomes all the more important for man to consciously align himself with God in order to strengthen and develop the good tendencies that he carries in himself by nature." *Major Themes* 18, 126.
6. The Sabians were most likely a Manichean community dwelling in Mecca or Medina. Apart from the pagans, there existed five religious communities in Arabia at the time: Jews, Christians, early Muslims, Manicheans (followers of Mani, the third-century CE "Prophet of Light"), and Zoroastrians (who worshipped Ahura Mazda as universal God, the "Lord of Light and Wisdom"). See Francois De Blois, "The Sabians (Sabi'un) in Pre-Islamic Arabia," *Acta Orientalia* 56 (1995): 39-61.
7. In verse 132, Abraham commands his sons to worship the Lord of all peoples, as does Isaac's son Jacob. So notwithstanding this prayer, which at the Ka'ba points to Abraham's descendants through Ishmael, it is clear in the narrative that Abraham intends all his descendants to worship the same God.
8. For more on this subject, see Uri Rubin's illuminating article, "Between Arabia and the Holy Land: a Mecca-Jerusalem Axis of Sanctity," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 34 (2008): 345-62.
9. Yusuf 'Ali, *The Glorious Qur'an: Translation and Commentary* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.) 62, n. 160; M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an: A new translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 18, n. a-d.
10. See W. Robertson Smith, *The Religion of the Semites: The Fundamental Institutions* (New York: Schocken, 1972) 269-311. In the Qur'an, the subject of lawful and unlawful foods frequently follows

- that of idolatry, as has been noted by Islahi. Mir, “The *Sura* as a Unity” 203; cf. 209, n. 33.
11. 19:42-48; cf. 21:51-70 and 26:69-104.
 12. Cf. Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an* 201.
 13. Abdel Haleem, “Qur'anic ‘jihad’: A Linguistic and Contextual Analysis,” *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 12.1-2 (2010): 152-53, 163.
 14. This verse itself consists of a ring, which may be represented as follows:
 - a There is no god but God, the Living, the Eternal
 - b Slumber never overtakes Him
 - c All things in the heavens and on earth belong to Him
 - d Who may intercede in His presence except with His permission?
 - e He knows what lies before His creatures and what lies behind them
 - d' They grasp nothing of His knowledge except as He wills
 - c' His Throne extends over the heavens and the earth
 - b' Supporting them does not fatigue Him
 - a' He is the Exalted, the Great

This structure has recently been highlighted by Mehdi Azaiez. Cf. “The Throne Verse (ayat-l-kursi) in Light of Rhetorical Analysis,” *International Qur'anic Studies Project*, 4 Mar. 2013, Web, 1 Aug. 2013.

Incidentally, another greatly beloved verse, the Light Verse (24:35), also features a ring structure. Thus:

- a God is the Light of the heavens and the earth
- b The example of His Light is like a niche wherein there is a lamp
- c The lamp is enclosed in glass like a glittering star
- d Lit from a blessed olive tree, neither of East nor of West, whose oil nearly glows though untouched by fire
- c' Light upon Light
- b' God guides to His Light whom He wills, and God gives examples for people
- a' God knows all things

The author would like to thank Omer Abid for pointing out the concentric arrangement of this verse.

15. Frolov, “The Problem of the ‘Seven Long’ Surahs,” *Studies in Arabic and Islam: Proceedings of the 19th Congress: Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants, Halle 1998*, ed. S. Leder et al. (Leuven: Peters, 2002) 202.
16. Al-Razi 4:125, as quoted in Cuypers, *The Banquet* 499. Cf. this remark by Abu Ishaq al-Shatibi from al-Andalus (d.790/1388): “No matter how many subjects the *sura* deals with, it is a single discourse; the end is linked to the beginning, and the beginning is linked to the end, and the whole is devoted to a single aim.” Quoted in Kate Zebiri, *Mahmud Shaltut and Islamic Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 143.
17. On the distinction of Islam soon after its emergence, we may recall the way it appeared to various outsiders. “Non-Muslim writers of the first century AH,” points out scholar Robert Hoyland, “attest that [Islam] was strictly monotheistic and iconoclastic; that its adherents had a sanctuary, their ‘House of God’ of Abrahamic association, called the Ka‘ba towards which they prayed and at which they sacrificed and revered a stone; and also that they followed Muhammad, who was their ‘guide’ and ‘instructor,’ whose ‘tradition’ and ‘laws’ they fiercely upheld and who prescribed for them abstinence from carrion, wine, falsehood and fornication. It is also noted that the Muslims held Jerusalem in honour, were hostile to the cross, denied that Christ was the son of God and conducted their worship in specific places bearing the name *masjid*.” Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton: Darwin, 1997) 549 (source names in the quotation omitted).

Chapter Three

1. We recall from our discussion of *The Opening* that the two classes of beings who may receive guidance—humans and jinn—exist as a pair. The conjunction of these two classes (in the formula *al-ins wa-l-jinn* and its variants) occurs twenty times in the Qur'an.
2. Islahi identifies numerous forms of complementarity, the principle ones being: 1. Brevity and Detail; 2. Principle and Illustration; 3. Different Types of Evidence (different types of evidence to support the same theme); 4. Difference in Emphasis (emphasizing different aspects of the same theme); 5. Premise and Conclusion; 6. Unity of Opposites (positive and negative sides of the same theme). Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'an* 77-79.
3. Al-Biqā'i 8:611-12; 'Ali, *The Glorious Kur'an* 1810, n. 6307.
4. Al-Razi 16:200.
5. Al-Suyuti, *Asrar tartib al-Qur'an* 53-54; Ibn 'Aqila 6:320-21; Islahi as cited in Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'an* 79; Robinson, "Surat Al 'Imran and Those with the Greatest Claim to Abraham," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 6.2 (2004): 4-6.
6. As stated above, the occurrence of letters at the beginning of various chapters of the Qur'an will be discussed in our chapter five.
7. Cyril Glassé, "Ahl al-Kitab," *The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam* (San Francisco, 1991).
8. On the Family of 'Imran (Biblical Amram) and Mary's position within it, see Suleiman A. Mourad, "Mary in the Qur'an: A reexamination of her presentation," *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context*, ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds (London: Routledge, 2008) 163-74. See also Michael Marx, "Glimpses of a Mariology in the Qur'an: From Hagiography to Theology via Religious-Political Debate," *The Qur'an in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'anic Milieu*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2010) 533-63.
9. The position of Islam is that the claims occurring in the New Testament of Jesus being the Son of God represent a distortion of Jesus' original message, a corruption that happened when the New Testament was written. Likewise, the Qur'an denies that Jesus was crucified (and resurrected thereafter); rather, God raised him up (4:157-58). On this subject, see Muhammet Tarakci and Suleyman Sayar, "The Qur'anic View of the Corruption of the Torah and the Gospels," *The Islamic Quarterly* 49 (2005): 227-45.
10. According to Galatians 3:17, Abraham preceded the Mosaic Law by some four hundred and thirty years.
11. See Cuypers, *The Banquet* 321, 468-69. Cf. the discussion of the Qur'an's response to religious diversity in Farid Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2002) 166-72.
12. Accounts of the battle may be found in the biography of Muhammad by Ibn Hisham (d. ca. 213/828), *Al-Sira al-nabawiyya* [The Prophetic Biography] (Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazm, 2001) 376-400, and the modern study by Safi al-Rahman al-Mubarakfuri, *Al-Rahiqa al-makhtum* [The Sealed Nectar] (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa, 2007) 232-55. Cf. C. F. Robinson, "Uhud," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed.
13. Note also that Jesus' Disciples are called his "helpers" (*ansar*, 3:52), the same term used for the followers of the Prophet. As Carl Ernst observes, "when Jesus is answered enthusiastically by his disciples, Muhammad's audience must have felt called upon to do the same." *How to Read the Qur'an* 184.
14. Al-Suyuti, *Asrar tartib al-Qur'an* 68.

Chapter Four

1. As cited in Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'an* 77-78. Our interpretation differs slightly from that of Islahi, since he finds the two chapters supporting the general thesis that good ultimately triumphs over evil, rather than together exemplifying the power of God.

Though Chapter 13 is sometimes called Medinan (it is designated as such, for example, in the 1924 Egyptian Standard Edition), many commentators have identified it as a late Meccan chapter, among them from the classical period al-Razi, al-Nisaburi, and Abu Hayyan. From the modern period, we cite such authorities as Nöldeke, Yusuf ‘Ali, Mawdudi, Sayyid Qutb, al-Tabataba’i, and Islahi. On proofs that it is indeed Meccan, see Sayyid Qutb, *Fi zilal al-Qur’ān*, vol. 4 (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 2009), 2066-67; Muhammad al-Tabataba’i, *Al-Mizan fi tafsir al-Qur’ān*, vol. 11 (Beirut: Mu’assat al-A’lami lil-Matbu’at, 1985), 362, 385-86; and Islahi (as cited in Mir, *Coherence in the Qur’ān*, 90).

2. Waldman, “New Approaches to ‘Biblical’ Materials in the Qur’ān,” *The Muslim World* 75 (1985): 1-3, 6; Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Qur’ān: Themes and Style* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005) 139, 155. Cf. Amina Wadud, citing Fazlur Rahman, “The Qur’ān is a moral history. It proposes moral values, which are ‘extrahistorical’ and ‘transcendental’ in nature, such that ‘their location at a point in history does not exhaust their practical impact or, one might say, their meaning.’” Wadud, *Qur’ān and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman’s Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 29-30; Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1982) 5.

The setting of the Joseph story within a national history at the end of Genesis does not preclude its containing messages of universal significance, of course. Citing the reading of André Wénin (*Joseph ou l’invention de la fraternité: Lecture narrative et anthropologique de la Genèse*, 37-50 [Brussels: Lessius, 2005]), Michel Cuypers points out, for example, that the story contrasts with the bloody account of Cain and Abel at the beginning of Genesis, as an example of the creation of fraternity by pardon and reconciliation (*La composition du Coran* 173). In the Qur’ān, though, the applicability of the story would seem further highlighted by its setting outside the context of a national history.

On the Qur’anic appropriation of Biblical narratives, see also Ernst, *How to Read the Qur’ān* 108-109.

3. Since the rings of Section B contain the story, they are included in our discussion. Diagrams of rings from the Epilogue of *Joseph* and from *Thunder* may be found in [Appendix A](#).
4. The former indicating that he had ripped it open while standing before her, the latter that she had snatched at it in pursuit. On Joseph’s shirt, see F. V. Greifenhagen, “The *qamis* in *Surat Yusuf*: A Prolegomenon to the Material Culture of Garments in the Formative Islamic Period,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 11.2 (2009): 72-92. Regarding this particular incident in the story, one may note that “the *qamis* would likely have suggested a fitted or tailored undergarment worn next to the skin and been associated with affluence, urban life, and perhaps a relative novelty vis-à-vis traditional Arab nomadic dress.” Greifenhagen, “The *qamis* in *Surat Yusuf*” 79.
5. Many commentators consider Joseph to be the one speaking in verses 52-53, by which they would understand that Joseph was referring to the wife’s testimony that he is blameless so that the husband would be reassured of his fidelity, that he had never taken advantage of his absence to dally with that man’s wife, notwithstanding Joseph’s being human and capable of error. But others, including Abu Hayyan, Ibn Kathir, Yusuf ‘Ali, and Sayyid Qutb, consider this to be the wife’s speech, in the manner we have outlined above. And the structure supports their interpretation, inasmuch as in the center of part d, her husband bids her to ask forgiveness, and here in part, she in effect does so.
6. On Joseph’s shirt as synecdoche for Joseph and his progress as a revealer of truth (first bloodied, then torn, then whole and fragrant), see Greifenhagen, “The *qamis* in *Surat Yusuf*” 72-92.
7. Al-Qurtubi 5:169.
8. Cf. Ibn al-Zubayr, who finds Chapter 13 to be an elaboration of 12:105-108. *Al-Burhan* 116-19; cf. also al-Suyuti, *Asrar tartib al-Qur’ān* 97, on the connection between the last verses of Chapter 12 and the first of Chapter 13.
9. The statements in 2:88, 100 and 3:110 about the majority being disbelievers are confined to the People of the Book.
10. According to the plot, a representative from each clan was to participate, striking with his sword, so that the responsibility for the Prophet’s death would be equally shared in Mecca. The Prophet,

however, was apprised of their designs and managed to get away, and that night the clansmen were nonplussed at finding ‘Ali, Muhammad’s cousin, in his place. Ibn Hisham 222-23; cf. Qur’an 8:30.

11. Sayyid Qutb 4:1950-51; the report that Chapter 12 was recited in Medina is cited in M. S. Stern, “Muhammad and Joseph: A Study of Koranic Narrative,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 44 (1985): 204.

Chapter Five

1. Al-Zarkashi 185; al-Suyuti, *Asrar tartib al-Qur'an* 69-79; Frolov 201-202.
2. ‘Ali, *The Glorious Kur'an* 481.
3. It will be noted that the current system of diacritics to distinguish between letters having the same consonantal form did not come into widespread use until two generations after the Prophet. Prior to this, typically one consonantal form without diacritics was used to signify any of several letters (the specific letter intended might be understood from the context).

For a detailed discussion of these initial letters, see A. T. Welch, “Al-Kur'an,” *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed.

Regarding the Scripture’s stress, in certain introductory verses, on orthographic letters, we further recall, with Islam Dayeh, that the Qur'an is “the first Arabic book; it is the first Arabic text to have been committed to writing. The Qur'an thus signifies an important transitional stage in the history of Arabic language and literature. The Qur'an witnessed and actively contributed to a transformation of literary culture from a predominantly oral to a written one.” Dayeh, “Al-Hawamim: Intertextuality and Coherence in Meccan Surahs,” *The Qur'an in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'anic Milieu*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2010) 469.

4. Similarly, the opening statements about glorifying God in numerous chapters of 57-66 may be found to have a linking function within the group.
5. Cuypers, “Une Lecture rhétorique et intertextuelle de la sourate al-Ikhlas,” *Annales islamologiques* (MIDEO) 25-26 (2004): 155.
6. Chapter names are taken from key words in opening verses or from key themes within chapters. In a number of cases, chapters have accrued additional names or epithets (see Ibn ‘Aqila 1:377-90). The names referred to below all are the principal ones for respective chapters, those in common use (as used, for example, in the 1924 Egyptian Standard Edition).
7. Though Jonah appears also in 68:48-50 and 21:87-88, he represents in the former an example the Prophet should not follow, and in the latter one of many prophets who face distress and are delivered. By contrast, his appearance in both 10:98 and 37:139-48 marks the climax of the chapter, where he stands out as a prophet whose people eventually hear his call and are saved. See A.H. Johns, “Jonah in the Qur'an: An Essay on Thematic Counterpoint,” *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 5.2 (2003): 48-71. See also Nicolai Sinai, “The Qur'an as Process,” *The Qur'an in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'anic Milieu*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2010) 435.
8. *The Bee* and *The Ant* are the only chapters in the Qur'an named after insects.
9. The Qur'an apparently features a different telling of the Legend of Alexander from the Syriac version. The Qur'anic story includes the prophecy of the coming of the end of the world, but not the prophecy of a universal Christian victory. Rather, mention of a future Byzantine military victory occurs in Chapter 30 (a Byzantine victory took place in 2/624 against the Persians, following their sack of Jerusalem in 614). On this subject, see Kevin van Bladel, “The Alexander Legend in the Qur'an 18:83-102,” *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context*, ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds (London: Routledge, 2008) 175-203.
10. Magians, i.e. Zoroastrians. As noted above, the Sabians were probably a Manichean community.

From a geographic perspective, we may observe that Judaism and Christianity were the two monotheistic religions of the Byzantine lands to the northwest (Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Anatolia), and that Manicism and Zoroastrianism were the two monotheistic religions of the Persian lands to

- the northeast (including Mesopotamia). Between Byzantium and Persia, in the Arabian Peninsula to the south, emerged the new monotheistic religion of Islam.
11. The exact date of the Battle of the Elephant is unknown, though Muslim tradition indicates 570, the year of the Prophet's birth. Abraha, an Christian king from Yemen whose army included elephants, had mounted a campaign against Mecca with the goal of eliminating it as an increasingly important city on the caravan route (to Palestine and Syria) and as a key pilgrimage site. His army was defeated, and Mecca with its Ka'ba remained secure.
In 8/630, directly after the conquest of Mecca, the city was again threatened with attack from the southeast, this time by the Bedouin tribes Hawazin and Thaqif. Their combined forces were defeated in the Valley of Hunayn.
 12. The Qur'an's overall structure may also be represented as follows:

- 1 Prayer of Praise and Supplication
2-49 System A (Groups 1-9)
50-56 Group 10
57-112 System A' (Groups 11-19)
113-114 Prayers of Refuge

Chapter Six

1. 'Ali, *The Glorious Kur'an* 1409.
2. Though individual verses may well have been added later to the Meccan chapters in various places, these additions are not likely to have affected significantly the ratio of these averages; in all probability, the ratio when Chapter 15 was revealed of the seven chapters to the other chapters of the Qur'an was approximately 2:1.

Thereafter, *mathani* held as a technical term for chapters of approximately this length (60+ verses) that occur toward the middle of the Qur'an. Later scholars distinguish between components of the Qur'an thus: Fatiha ("Opening," 1: 6 verses), Tiwal ("Long Ones," 2-9: 170 verses avg.), Mi'un ("Hundred-Length Chapters," evidently 10-28, though the last chapter of the set is not specified in the texts we have consulted: 104 verses avg.); Mathani ("Doubled Ones," evidently 29-56: 62 verses avg.); Mufassalat ("Separated Chapters," i.e., by the invocation, evidently 57-112: 21 verses avg.); Mu'awwidhatan ("Two Prayers of Refuge," 113-114: 6 verses avg.). Cf. al-Zarkashi 172-73, al-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan* 167-68; Uri Rubin, "Exegesis and Hadith: The case of the seven *Mathani*," *Approaches to the Qur'an*, G. R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef, eds. (London: Routledge, 1993) 141-56.

The first fifty-seven chapters to have been revealed of the Qur'an, according to Nöldeke's periodization, are: 96, 74, 111, 106, 108, 104, 107, 102, 105, 92, 90, 94, 93, 97, 86, 91, 80, 68, 87, 95, 103, 85, 73, 101, 99, 82, 81, 53, 84, 100, 79, 77, 78, 88, 89, 75, 83, 69, 51, 52, 56, 70, 55, 112, 109, 113, 114, 1 (Early Meccan); 54, 37, 71, 76, 44, 50, 20, 26, 15 (Middle Meccan; according to Nöldeke, twelve more Middle Meccan chapters were later revealed). The number of verses in these chapters, besides 50-56 (whose verses total 445 verses, an average of 64 verses per chapter), is 1634 verses, an average of 33 verses per chapter. From Nöldeke's chronology as cited in Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an* 77.

Neuwirth, on the other hand, proposes that these twenty-five chapters (in addition to the seven chapters, 50-56) had been revealed when 15:87 was sent down: 111, 109, 106, 105, 96, 94, 89, 88, 87, 86, 85, 84, 83, 81, 80, 78, 77, 75, 74, 73, 70, 69, 68, 65, 56, 55, 54, 53, 52, 51, 50, 37 (list not in chronological order). The number of verses in these chapters besides 50-56 is 841 verses, an average of 34 verses per chapter. Neuwirth, "Referentiality and Textuality in *Surat al-Hijr*: Some Observations on the Qur'anic 'Canonical Process' and the Emergence of a Community," *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an*, ed. Issa J. Boullata, (London: Routledge, 2000) 158.

The final total including all chapters (counting only six verses for Chapter 1) is 6235 verses, an average of 55 verses per chapter.

3. Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'an* 87-88.
4. Dayeh 488-89.
5. As discussed in Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Qur'an* 106.
6. Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire: Heaven and Hell in Islamic Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009) 73-74. Cf. Amina Wadud, who remarks on the “partnership, friendship, comfort and harmony in Paradise, as opposed to the isolation, loneliness, and despair of Hell. Perhaps one might be reunited with his or her earthly mate in Paradise, provided that the basis for the reunion is shared belief and good deeds.” *Qur'an and Woman* 57.
7. It will be observed that Chapters 50-53 begin with oaths, and that Chapter 56 contains an oath at the center.
8. It is interesting to note the relationships between the numbers of some of these correspondences, such as 51:6 and 56:1 (inversion), 51:25 and 56:26 (successive verse number), 53:14 and 56:28 (doubled verse number), and 52:48 and 56:96 (doubled verse number). It would seem that these relationships serve to highlight the connection between Chapters 50-53 on the one hand and Chapter 56 on the other.
9. See Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Qur'an* 200-201.
10. ‘Ad were a tribe who built a city named Iram known for its pillars (89:6-7). They are thought to have been from Yemen. As for Thamud, they resided in dwellings carved out of mountains (15:80-83). Their monuments at Mada’ in Salih in northwestern Arabia resemble those of the Nabateans at Petra in nearby Jordan. For a discussion of these and other ancient peoples and their ruined cities, cited in the Qur'an as reminders of God's wrath, see Ernst, *How to Read the Qur'an* 83-92.
11. Qutb, as quoted in Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'an* 69-70.
12. We may keep in mind, in this regard, that “Judgment is not simply the weighing of good deeds against bad on a scale . . . but rather a thorough accounting of acts and the intentions behind them.” Jamal J. Elias, “God,” *Key Themes for the Study of Islam*, ed. Jamal J. Elias (Oxford: Oneworld, 2010) 172; cf. Rahman, *Major Themes* 20.
13. Al-Qurtubi 9:99.
14. Qutb 6:3445.
15. ’Ali, *The Glorious Kur'an* 1471.
16. There may well be a mystical dimension to this number (e.g., five major reference points in the Qur'an, as outlined in our previous chapter; nine groups in each system, the central one being the fifth; five parts to the central section of the previous chapter; five central verses in this chapter, as indicated below). And in 55 we have two fives in one number.

The number seven, as is well known, may have a mystical dimension as well (we note that both Chapters 2 and 3 are composed of seven sections, and that this central group consists of seven chapters). Perhaps of significance as well: 57, or these two particular numbers put together, doubled equals 114, the total quantity of chapters in the Qur'an.
17. We recall from *The Opening* that the revelation of the Qur'an is an answer to prayer.
18. Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'an* 81.
19. 54:4-5 introduces the theme; these verses may be considered a version of the refrain, which then occurs in an identical form in the remainder of the chapter. The refrain in Chapter 55 is identical throughout the chapter.

On the pronounced usage of rhythm and rhyme here, concerning Chapter 54 specifically, see Devin J. Stewart, “Divine Epithets and the *Dibacchius: Clausulae* and Qur'anic Rhythm,” *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 15.2 (2013): 41-52.
20. Joel 2:30-31 (3:3-4 in the Hebrew Bible); Acts 2:19-20, as cited in Rubin, “Muhammad's Message in Mecca: Warnings, Signs, and Miracles,” *The Cambridge Companion to Muhammad*, ed. Jonathan E. Brockopp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 42.

21. Al-Alusi, *Rawh al-ma‘ani* [The Fresh Breeze of the Meanings], ed. Fu’ad ‘Abd al-Ghaffar, vol. 13 (Cairo: Al-Maktaba al-Tawfiqiyya, n.d.) 414.
22. Douglas, *Thinking in Circles* 37.

Conclusion

1. On the views of this school, expounded in various forms over the last century, see Harald Motzki, “The Collection of the Qur’an: A Reconsideration of Western Views in Light of Recent Methodological Developments,” *Der Islam* 78 (2001): 1-34. As Motzki relates, Paul Casanova (1911) and Alphonse Mingana (1915) were the first scholars to speculate that the collection of the Qur’an dates to the time of ‘Abd al-Malik; the idea was taken up again in the 1970s.

That the Qur’an involved numerous contributors—to the extent that it might best be regarded, in fact, as a general cultural product—was the theory of John Wansbrough. He speaks of the Qur’an as “not the carefully executed work of one or more men, but rather the product of an organic development from originally independent traditions during a long period of transmission.” *Qur’anic Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) 47. For a recent variation of this theory, see Claude Gilliot, “Reconsidering the Authorship of the Qur’an: Is the Qur’an Partly the Fruit of a Progressive and Collective Work?” *The Qur’an in Its Historical Context*, ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds (London: Routledge, 2008) 88-108.

The quotations about the presumed hasty collection of the Qur’an are, respectively, taken from Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) 18; Andrew Rippin, *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, vol. 1 (London: Routledge, 1990) 23; Angelika Neuwirth, “Structure and the Emergence of Community,” *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur’an*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006) 143.

2. For example, Ibn al-Zubayr, al-Zarkashi, and al-Suyuti. See Ibn al-Zubayr, *Al-Burhan fi tanasub suwar al-Qur’an* 53; al-Zarkashi, *Al-Burhan fi ‘ulum al-Qur’an* 38; al-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fi ‘ulum al-Qur’an* 701.
3. Behnam Sadeghi and Uwe Bergmann, “The Codex of a Companion of the Prophet and the Qur’an of the Prophet,” *Arabica* 57 (2010): 346, 353. See also Behnam Sadeghi and Mohsen Goudarzi, “San‘a’ 1 and the Origins of the Qur’an,” *Der Islam* 87.1-2 (2012): 1-129.
4. Mir, *Coherence in the Qur’an* 101.
5. Ernst, *How to Read the Qur’an* 166.
6. Wagner, *Opening the Qur’an: Introducing Islam’s Holy Book* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2008) 41.
7. Cuypers, *The Banquet* 454.
8. Johns, “Jonah in the Qur’an: An Essay on Thematic Counterpoint,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 5.2 (2003): 67; cf. F. Rahman, *Major Themes* 136-37.
9. Watt, *Muhammad at Medina* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962) 335. As Kenneth Cragg has said, “He was throughout an apostle in a context, a protagonist in the field, a spokesman with an audience, a man with a mission.” Cragg, *The Event of the Qur’an* 114.

The term “creative interruption” is found in Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953) 80.

Appendix B

1. See Mir, *Coherence in the Qur’an* 76, 81, and the numerous articles by Cuypers cited in the Bibliography.
2. It is noteworthy that this chapter is not triumphal in tone; the last verse, which follows the eference to the great victory for Islam, contains an instruction to praise God and to seek His forgiveness.

Appendix C

1. Islahi as cited in Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'an* 85-87.
2. The verse states that God inspired the bee to build its cells in mountains, trees, and human dwellings.
3. Abdel Haleem, "The Qur'anic Employment of the Story of Noah," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 12.1 (2006): 51.
4. Cf. Hussein Abdul-Raof, who finds a "circular shape" in four chapters of this group: Chapters 17 and 18 beginning with the theme of prophethood, and Chapters 19 and 20 ending with the same theme. Abdul-Raof, "Textual Progression and Presentation Technique in Qur'anic Discourse: An Investigation of Richard Bell's Claims of 'Disjointedness' with Especial Reference to Q. 17-20," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 7.2 (2005): 40-41.
5. Al-Zarkashi 174-75; al-Suyuti, *Asrar tartib al-Qur'an* 129-31; 'Ali, *The Glorious Kur'an* 1260; Dayeh, "Al-Hawamim: Intertextuality and Coherence in Meccan Suras," *The Qur'an in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'anic Milieu*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth et. al (Leiden: Brill, 2010): 461-98.
6. 'Ali, *The Glorious Kur'an* 1377.
7. 'Ali, *The Glorious Kur'an* 1496.
8. On the accusation of Noah as being possessed by jinn, see 23:25 and 54:9.
9. Arab poets commonly were thought to be inspired by jinn. On the soothsayers' receipt of information from jinn before Islam, see Gerald Hawting, "Eavesdropping on the heavenly assembly and the protection of the revelation from demonic corruption," *Self-Referentiality in the Qur'an*, ed. Stefan Wild (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006) 25-37.
10. Cuypers, "Structures rhétoriques des sourates 85 à 90," *Annales islamologiques (MIDEO)* 35 (2001): 86-88.
11. Cuypers, "Structures rhétoriques des sourates 85 à 90" 94-95.
12. Cuypers, "Structures rhétoriques des sourates 99 à 104," *Annales islamologiques (MIDEO)* 33 (1999): 31-62.
13. Cuypers, "Une Lecture rhétorique et intertextuelle de la sourate al-Ikhlas" *Annales islamologiques (MIDEO)* 25-26 (2004): 155.

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